

A Corpus of Early Medieval Armenian Silver

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Source: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 69 (2015), pp. 115-146

Published by: Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26497711>

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# A Corpus of Early Medieval Armenian Silver

TIMOTHY GREENWOOD

with NOËL ADAMS

The wealth of literary and architectural evidence for the study of early medieval Armenia stands in sharp contrast to the dearth of surviving metalwork. In a recent study of the decorative arts in Armenia between the fourth and seventh centuries, Jannic Durand and Ioanna Rapti noted that the excavations of the city of Dvin had revealed a rich and varied material culture but surprisingly had not contributed any new finds of precious metalwork.<sup>1</sup> They rightly drew attention to a small golden cross found in the vicinity of Dvin in 1934, as well as a bronze oil lamp of unknown provenance and suggested that these had proximate dates.<sup>2</sup>

1 J. Durand and I. Rapti, "Les arts somptuaires chrétiens en Arménie: Le plus anciens témoins," in *Armenia Sacra*, ed. J. Durand, I. Rapti, and D. Giovannoni (Paris, 2007), 100. There are references in early medieval Armenian literature to both liturgical and nonliturgical vessels. By way of illustration, see Sebēos, *Patmut' iwn Sebēosi*, ed. G. V. Abgaryan (Erevan, 1979), 91.21–24, which records that all the vessels of the church of St. Grigor in Dvin were transferred to the city of Karin/Theodosiopolis in 591. For nonliturgical vessels, see problem 18 of the seventh-century mathematical *Problems and Solutions* of Anania Širakac'i: *Anania Širakac'i Matenagrut'yunē*, ed. A. G. Abrahamyan (Erevan, 1944), 227.38–228.4; English translation and commentary by T. W. Greenwood, "A Reassessment of the Life and Mathematical Problems of Anania Širakac'i," *REArm* 33 (2011): 131–86, at 164 and 171–72. This describes the melting down of a large silver container (*apalarē*) into several smaller pieces, including two unidentified vessels (both called a *mesur*), two goblets (both called a *bažak*), and two different types of plate (two *skutels* and one *skawarāk*).

2 Ibid., 100–101; see also C. Metzger, "Croix" and "Lampe d'huile" in Durand, Rapti, and Giovannoni, *Armenia Sacra*, nos. 30 and 31.

But they acknowledged that these both reflected forms and types found across the eastern Mediterranean and underlined that it was difficult to distinguish between local products and Byzantine imports.

This state of affairs now stands in need of revision. One previously unknown silver cross carved with a long inscription in Armenian characters has appeared; for the reasons given below, this will be entitled the Narses Cross.<sup>3</sup> Two other pieces of liturgical silverware carrying Armenian inscriptions have also surfaced. These were discovered together in Divriği in 1969 but it has taken over four decades for their significance to be recognized. These will be titled the First and Second Divriği Crosses respectively. The first was published but unappreciated for its Armenian associations, the second was reported in passing but has remained unpublished.<sup>4</sup> As shall be revealed below, their inscriptions confirm that these two pieces have a direct relationship to one another. This study contends that all three

3 The Narses Cross has been in private collections since before 1956. The following assessment of its design and manufacture, as well as the linguistic, palaeographic, and historical analysis of its inscription, attests its authenticity.

4 N. Fıratlı, "Some Recent Acquisitions," *Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri Yıllığı* 15–16 (1969): 197, no. 2 and fig. 14; M. M. Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium* (Baltimore, 1986), no. 76; E. Dodd, "Three Early Byzantine Silver Crosses," *DOP* 41 (1987): 165–179. The First Divriği Cross is preserved in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, no. 8051; the Second Divriği Cross is preserved in the same collection, no. 8052.





FIG. 2 The Narses Cross, front (photograph courtesy Yanni Petsopoulos)



FIG. 2 The Narses Cross, back (photograph courtesy Yanni Petsopoulos)

pieces were fashioned in the sixth or seventh centuries and that although the inscriptions on the First and Second Divriği Crosses were added subsequently, this had occurred at the latest by the middle of the ninth century. Most unexpectedly, a small corpus of early medieval Armenian silverware has emerged.

Given their unpublished or otherwise obscure character, each of the pieces will receive a full description, in terms of appearance, design and manufacture and as well as the transcription and translation of its Armenian inscription. The individual and collective significance of the three objects will also be considered.

## The Narses Cross

### *Design and Manufacture*

The Narses Cross (fig. 1) is a solid silver cross measuring 33.3 by 25.3 centimeters, slender in profile and weighing just 326 grams. Its arms are slightly flared, each concluding with two original spherical finials of the

pommé type which were threaded onto the pointed ends and then soldered. The two lateral arms each bear two punched holes which would originally have carried chains for *pendilia*. A border of two engraved lines runs around the perimeter of the obverse. Unfortunately the original tang has broken off but the riveted plates which now clasp the base of the cross are positioned in such a way as to confirm such a tang once existed; a jagged edge remains, indicating that it was forcibly snapped off from the staff or base which originally held it. The reverse displays a simple two-line border incised around its perimeter but is otherwise undecorated (fig. 2). These aspects, however, are overshadowed by two dominant features. First, an impressive cabochon comprising an exceptionally large garnet in a gold setting has been mounted at the intersection of the arms.<sup>5</sup> And second, a long inscription in Armenian characters extends around the perimeter of the obverse within the

5 The cabochon receives separate treatment and analysis in the appendix, pp. 147–57 below.

border. Each character was hollowed out and then filled with niello, a metallic alloy. The niello was ground down, smoothed and polished, leaving the inlay level with the surrounding surface. Much of the niello has been lost, leaving the excavated characters, but traces remain in six characters of the top arm, four characters of the left arm, eighteen characters of the right arm and one character of the bottom arm.

Several features of the Narses Cross support the contention that it was manufactured in the East Roman empire in late antiquity. It shares many of the characteristics displayed by other early Byzantine silver crosses from the Kaper Koraon and related treasures published by Marlia Mango.<sup>6</sup> Six of those crosses are solid silver and all of them have flared arms. It is also striking that the crosses depicted on chalices, patens, and spoons of the Hama treasure possess similarly flared arms, as do those on patens of the Stuma treasure and plaques of the Antioch treasure.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, two of the patens from the Sion treasure are decorated with flared gilded crosses.<sup>8</sup> Three of the crosses published by Mango have finials or serifs; one displays spherical finials, a second tear-shaped, and the third employs flat, circular serifs of the *patté* type.<sup>9</sup> Spherical or tear-shaped finials also feature on several crosses depicted on other silverware.<sup>10</sup> Four of the crosses published by



FIG. 3 Byzantine processional cross, ca. 1000–1050 CE, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund 1993, acc. no. 1993.163 (photograph courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art)

6 Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, nos. 7 (The Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, no. 57.632), 8 (Walters Art Gallery, no. 57.641), 65 (Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collection, BZ.1955.17), 67 (The Toledo Museum of Art, no. 53.48a), 68 (Walters Art Gallery, no. 57.1827) and 76 (Istanbul Archaeological Museum, no. 8051).

7 Hama Treasure: *ibid.*, no. 3, a chalice (Walters Art Gallery, no. 57.636); nos. 4–6, patens (Walters Art Gallery, nos. 57.644, 57.637, and 57.643); and nos. 18–20, spoons (Walters Arts Gallery, nos. 57.651, 57.649 and 57.647); Stuma Treasure, nos. 36 and 39, patens (Istanbul Archaeological Museum, nos. 3761 and 3760); and Antioch Treasure, nos. 44–46, plaques (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, nos. 50.5.1, 50.5.2, and 47.100.36).

8 S. A. Boyd, “A ‘Metropolitan’ Treasure from a Church in the Provinces: An Introduction to the Study of the Sion Treasure,” in *Ecclesiastical Silver Plate in Sixth-Century Byzantium*, ed. S. A. Boyd and M. M. Mango (Washington, DC, 1992), nos. 4 and 5, patens (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1963.36.2 and BZ.1963.36.3).

9 Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, nos. 8, 65, and 76.

10 *Ibid.*, nos. 3, 60 (Cleveland Museum of Art, no. 50.381), and 64 (Abegg Stiftung, Bern, no. 8.36.63); see also Boyd, “‘Metropolitan’ Treasure,” no. 22a and b, book covers (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1963.36.9–10) and figs. S22.1 and S22.5; and nos. 37–38, standing lamps (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1963.36.17 and BZ.1963.36.16) and figs. S37.1 and S38.1.

Mango carry inscriptions running vertically and then horizontally within a simple single or double-line border and one of these is described as “the only known early Byzantine cross with a niello-inlaid inscription.”<sup>11</sup> The Narses Cross complements this example. Two of the crosses have four holes for *pendilia* while a third possesses two.<sup>12</sup>

Conversely, the Narses Cross may be distinguished on several grounds from the well-known group of five silver middle Byzantine processional crosses published together by Evans—the Adrianople or Benaki Cross, the fragmentary Cleveland Cross, the Metropolitan Museum Cross (fig. 3), the Cluny

11 *Ibid.*, nos. 7, 65, 67, and 76; no. 67 has the niello-inlaid inscription.

12 Four holes: *ibid.*, nos. 7 and 8; two holes: no. 76.



Cross, and the Ortiz Cross in Geneva.<sup>13</sup> They are, with one exception, of much greater size than the Narses Cross. They were all manufactured in the same way, with silver sheets that sheath an iron core, and so in contrast to the solid silver early Byzantine crosses discussed above. They carry elaborate decoration on the obverse, with a cross emanating from the central medallion at the intersection of the arms. The Benaki Cross presents a gilded cross outlined in niello while the other four employ finely wrought, gilded repoussé patterns to produce the cross-shaped decoration. In other words, all the middle Byzantine crosses display a cross within a cross on the obverse; this is not a feature of late antique crosses. Unlike the early medieval crosses, the middle Byzantine crosses do not have holes punched through their lateral arms for *pendilia*. Moreover the finials on three of them comprise hemispheres or hexadecagons fitted over and then riveted to the extremities of the arms. Again this is a different approach and artistic treatment to that encountered on early Byzantine silver crosses. In terms of its manufacture and design, therefore, the Narses Cross is closely related to the family of early Byzantine silver crosses fashioned inside the Empire and should be distinguished, on several grounds, from the group of middle Byzantine crosses.

### *The Cabochon*

The Narses Cross presents a single red garnet set in a gold filigree collet mounting at the intersection of the arms. This has been analysed separately by Noël Adams and her findings are presented in the appended study. I shall therefore confine myself to two observations. First, its impressive size reflects the wealth and influence of the donor. Here is someone capable of obtaining a rare and precious jewel and presenting it on his terms through a specifically commissioned and inscribed piece of silverware. The prominence of the cabochon articulates a visual rhetoric of power. And

13 *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era AD 843–1261*, ed. H. C. Evans and W. D. Wixom (New York, 1997), no. 23 (Benaki Museum, Athens, T.A. 146), no. 24 (Cleveland Museum of Art, no. 70.36), no. 25 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1993.163), no. 26 (Musée National du Moyen Âge et des Thermes de l'Hôtel de Cluny, Paris, CI. 23295), and no. 27 (The George Ortiz Collection, Geneva, 260). A sixth middle Byzantine processional cross has recently been identified: P. Hetherington, "The Work of Mark," *Apollo Magazine* (March 2010).



FIG. 4 The Dvin Cross, History Museum of Armenia, inv. no. 3087 (photograph courtesy History Museum of Armenia)

second, it is striking that two stone crosses excavated at Dvin in Armenia and dated to the seventh century present highly decorated central medallions. A socket surrounded by a simple band dominates the center of the massive freestanding cross now on permanent display in the History Museum of Armenia (fig. 4).<sup>14</sup> A band surrounds a rosette at the center of the second, a damaged cross which may once have been mounted on a stele.<sup>15</sup> Evidently such centrally planned decoration was a feature of early medieval carved crosses in Dvin, even if the exact nature of that decoration cannot be determined.

14 History Museum of Armenia, Erevan, no. 3087.

15 Durand, Rapti, and Giovannoni, *Armenia Sacra*, no. 22 (History Museum of Armenia, Erevan, no. 1905–34). One of the horizontal arms has broken off and one of two stylized acanthus leaves sprouting from the base of the cross is also missing.

### *The Armenian Inscription*

The visual regularity of the inscription, a single line of characters extending evenly around the perimeter of the obverse, is complemented by a simple linear layout. The inscription opens at the top left corner of the upper arm, moves right and then down the right-hand vertical of both the upper and lower arms to the bottom right hand corner of the lower arm—although the smooth transition to the lower arm is disrupted by the cabochon and the characters are displaced to the right—before extending along the bottom horizontal plane of the lower arm. The final two characters—*ecʿ* and *ho* [*b* and *Հ*]<sup>16</sup>—are reduced in size and compressed, at a slight angle, into the space available. The inscription then restarts with the top left corner of the upper arm and descends the left-hand vertical, again with displacement by the cabochon, to the left corner of the bottom arm. This completes the vertical axis. The inscription then resumes with the horizontal. It begins at the bottom corner of the left lateral arm, moving up and across the left and then right arms—although it is interrupted by the center—before moving down the vertical at the extremity of the right lateral arm. It then restarts with the bottom of the left lateral arm and moves along the lower horizontal, leaping the cabochon once more and concluding at the bottom corner of the right lateral arm. The inscription ends with an isolated character, *cʿo* [*ծ*], situated above the final *ša* [*Շ*]. Its location suggests that the engraver ran out of space and was forced to compromise the linear and liminal qualities of the inscription. This contention is supported by the omission of what should have been the penultimate character, *ayb* [*Ա*], and a gradual reduction in the size of the characters across the lower horizontal of the right arm in comparison with those on the upper horizontal.

In summary, therefore, the inscription exploits the vertical axis before the horizontal. On both axes, it extends over three of the four sides in a continuous line before returning to the starting point to complete the fourth side. This might seem to be unduly complicated but such a layout assists legibility. If all the characters had faced inward, the lines of text on the lower horizontals of the lateral arms would be upside-down. Moreover while those on the right-hand vertical of the upper and lower arms do face inward, those on the left hand vertical face outward. In fact all of the lines of text are either on the correct axis or have been rotated



FIG. 5 Gilded silver binding, dated 1255 CE, Matenadaran Institute of Manuscripts, Yerevan, M7690 (photograph courtesy Matenadaran Institute of Manuscripts)

90° clockwise, requiring the viewer merely to tilt their head to the right to read the characters on the vertical axis. By contrast, the inscriptions running around the edges of later medieval Armenian bindings on Gospel manuscripts, both in silver and in leather, adopt an entirely different principle (fig. 5); the characters all face inward.<sup>16</sup> These, however, were intended to be read by turning the binding in one's hands. The layout of the inscription on the Narses Cross aids anyone reading it when the object was stationary; it would not have been possible to read it if the cross was moving.

Despite the apparently undifferentiated quality of the strings of Armenian characters around the perimeter, assistance is given to the viewer through

16 For further discussion of this binding, see *ibid.*, no. 115 (Matenadaran 7690); *Armenia Imprints of a Civilization*, ed. G. Uluhogian, B. L. Zekiyian, and V. Karapetian (Milan, 2011), no. 40. For late seventeenth-century leather bindings, see D. Kouymjian, “Les reliures à inscriptions des manuscrits arméniens,” in *Arménie: La magie de l’écrit*, ed. C. Mutaftian (Marseille, 2007), 236–47, especially 4.70–75.

the inclusion of two small crosses, one at the very start of the inscription in the top left corner of the upper arm—still partially inlaid with niello—and the other in the bottom corner of the left lateral arm. These indicate where to start on both the vertical and then horizontal axes. Intriguingly the movement from the vertical to the horizontal does not correspond to, or represent, any clear break in the flow of the inscription, although the cross on the left lateral arm occurs at a point of transition from the primary to the secondary commemoration. One can start reading along the horizontal and pick up on its meaning straightaway.<sup>17</sup>

The use of such crosses to indicate the starting point on circular inscriptions is very common. They are found on chalices and patens as well as censers, polykandela and standing lamps.<sup>18</sup> It is much less

common to find an inscription employing two such crosses. Although Greek inscriptions on lampstands and column-shaft revetments occasionally employ two crosses, these inscriptions tend to comprise two or three lines.<sup>19</sup> Multiple crosses are sometimes encountered in inscriptions divided between different surfaces of the same object.<sup>20</sup> The inclusion of the two crosses on the two axes of the Narses Cross, together with the observation that each of the four lines ends with a complete word, indicates that the layout of the inscription was planned. Signs of compression, however, along the bottom horizontal plane of the lower arm and in the bottom of the right lateral arm, suggest that the execution of the engraving proved to be problematic, perhaps because the engraver was unfamiliar with Armenian characters. This contention shall be developed below.

Other than the pieces discussed in this study, there is no published medieval silverware inscribed with Armenian with which to make comparison, either in terms of layout or content. There is, however, a small corpus of Armenian inscriptions dating from the sixth and seventh centuries. Of these, six extend as single lines of text across the facades of the churches whose foundation they commemorate, including that at Bagaran (fig. 6).<sup>21</sup> The decision to wrap these structures with their foundation inscriptions recalls the liminal character of the inscription on the Narses Cross; this is also a feature of the Second Divriği Cross, discussed below. The lapidary inscriptions identify those responsible for the foundation and invite intercession for them and their immediate families; the inscriptions on the three pieces of silverware do likewise, naming

17 I am grateful to Reader B for this ingenious suggestion.

18 Patens: Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium* (n. 4 above), nos. 4–5, 34 (Istanbul Archaeological Museum, no. 3759), 35 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1924.5), 36 (Istanbul Archaeological Museum, no. 3761), 60 and 64; Boyd, “‘Metropolitan’ Treasure” (n. 8 above), nos. 1 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1963.36.1), 2 (Archaeological Museum, Antalya, no. 1020), 3 (Geneva, Private Collection), 4 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1963.36.2), 5 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1963.36.3), and 6 (Archaeological Museum, Antalya, no. 1021). Chalices: Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, nos. 2 (Walters Art Gallery, no. 57.642), 3, 27 (Museum of the Church of St. Anne, Jerusalem), 28 (previously in the W. L. Eagleton Collection, Washington, DC; now at Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1993.1), 29 (British Museum, London, no. 1914.4–15.1), 41 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, no. 47.100.34), 57 (Cleveland Museum of Art, no. 50.378), 61, and 62 (Abegg Stiftung, Bern, no. 8.39.63 and 8.38.63); Boyd, “‘Metropolitan’ Treasure,” nos. 9 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1979.8), 10 (Archaeological Museum Antalya, unnumbered), and 11 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1965.1.11). Censers: *ibid.*, nos. 18 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1965.1.5) and 19 (Archaeological Museum, Antalya, no. 1019). Polykandela: *ibid.*, nos. 25 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1963.36.4), 26 (Archaeological Museum, Antalya, no. 1053), 27 (Archaeological Museum, Antalya, no. 1054), 28 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1965.1.1), 29 (Archaeological Museum, Antalya, no. 1051), 30 (Archaeological Museum, Antalya, no. 1052), 31 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1963.36.5), 32 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1963.36.6, a–c), 33 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1963.36.7), 34 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1965.1.8), 35 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1965.1.7), and 36 (Archaeological Museum, Antalya, nos. 1078, 1084, 1079 and 1081). Standing lamps: Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 33 (Abegg Stiftung, Bern, no. 8.114.64); Boyd, “‘Metropolitan’ Treasure,” nos. 37 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1963.36.17), 38 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1963.36.16), 39 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1963.36.15), and 40 (Archaeological Museum, Antalya, no. 1092).

19 Lampstands: Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, nos. 11 and 12 (Walters Art Gallery, nos. 57.634 and 57.635). Column Shaft Revetment: Boyd, “‘Metropolitan’ Treasure,” no. 55 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1965.1.9).

20 See for example the ewer from Kaper Koraon, where each part of the inscription shared between the body and the handle is introduced by a cross: Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 14 (Walters Art Gallery, no. 57.645). Separate crosses introduce the blessing and the owner on silver spoons, shared between the handle and disc respectively: *ibid.*, nos. 52–55 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1937.38–41).

21 T. W. Greenwood, “A Corpus of Early Medieval Armenian Inscriptions,” *DOP* 58 (2004): 27–91, at 30–36 and A.3 (Bagaran), A.4 (Alaman), A.5 (Bagavan), and A.8 (Naxčavan). The two other inscriptions, at Elvard and Ojun, were deemed too fragmentary for inclusion in that corpus.





FIG. 6 Southern facade of the church of S. Yovhannēs, Bagaran, with single-line foundation inscription running along top row of blocks, Archives of the History Museum of Armenia, inv. no. 941 (photograph courtesy History Museum of Armenia)

the sponsor and inviting intercession for him and others. This coincidence in terms of layout and content implies some relationship between these two groups of inscriptions. One might speculate that the direction of influence was from inscribed object to inscribed structure on the grounds of portability, rather than the other way around, but it is never going to be possible to prove this beyond reasonable doubt.

#### *Transcription and Translation*

The transcription follows the sequence of the layout described above. The two small crosses are identified using +. The disruption caused by the cabochon is marked with || and the transfer from one side to another is identified by /.

+ՍՈՒՐԲ Զ/ՓՐԿԶԱԿԱՆ ԶԽԱԶՍ ԱՐԱՐԻ  
|| Ի ՍՈՒՐԲ || ՍՏԵՓԱՆՈՍ Ի ԳԵԱՒԷՂԻ  
ՓԱՌԱԿԵՐՏ ԵՍ ԿՈՄՍ ՓԱՌ ՆԵՐՍԵԶ /  
ՄԵՂԱԻՈՐ ԵՒ ԱՂ<Ն>ԱՐԺԱՆ ՎԱՍՆ  
|| ԹՈՂՈՒ || ԹԵԱՆ ՄԵՂԱՑ ԻՄՈՑ ԵՒ  
ՀԱՆԳՍՏԵԱՆ /  
+ՀՈԳԻՈՑ / ՀԱՐՑ ԵՒ ՆԱԽՆԵԱՑ ՄԵՐՈՑ ||  
Ց ԵՒ ՇԻՆՈՒԹԵԱՆ ԵՒ ԽԱՂԱՂ/ՈՒԹԵԱՆ /  
ՀԱՅՈՑ ՏԱՆՑ ԵՒ ԳԻՒՂԻՑ || ՄԵՐՈՑ ԵՒ  
ԱԶԳԻ ԽՈՐԽՈՐՈՒՆԻԿ<Ա>Ց /

+ I Nerseh *Koms p'ar* sinful and unworthy made this holy redeeming cross for [the church of] Saint Step'anos in the village of P'arakert for the remission of my sins and for the repose + of the souls of our fathers and ancestors and for the prosperity and peace of Armenian houses and our villages and the family of Xorxorunik'

#### *Linguistic and Palaeographic Analysis*

The inscription contains one variant form *geawti* rather than *gelj* for the genitive of *gewl* "village." This noun declines in an irregular manner but this specific variation has not previously been noted. Otherwise the inscription's lexicon and grammar is consistent with standard classical Armenian.

One phrase however is striking. The inscription connects the manufacture and donation of the Narses Cross with the spiritual health of the sponsor and his ancestors, *vasn t'otut'ean metac' imoc' ew hangstean hogwoc' harc' ew naxneac' meroc'*, that is, "for the remission of my sins and for the repose of the souls of our fathers and ancestors." The first sentiment, the remission of one's sins, is found consistently in sixth

and seventh-century Armenian inscriptions.<sup>22</sup> The Valan mosaic inscription in Jerusalem refers to *vasn t'olut'ean melac'*, "for the remission of sins," while the foundation inscription at Alaman, dated to the mid-630s, refers to the church being built *vasn mer hogwoc'*, "for our souls."<sup>23</sup> The second element, however, the repose or rest of the souls of one's deceased relatives, is not found in other contemporary Armenian texts or inscriptions. It is implied in the tradition of the family tomb or mausoleum. The late ninth-century Armenian historian T'ovma Arcruni recorded how at the death of prince Derenik Arcruni in 887, his corpse was laid to rest with his fathers in the monastery of the Holy Cross in the district of Albag.<sup>24</sup> Crucially this notion of rest or repose is found in numerous Greek inscriptions on early Byzantine silverware through the use of the term *ἀναπαύσεως*. Eight objects in Mango's survey of early Byzantine silver and seven objects in the Sion Treasure carry inscriptions containing this phrase.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, although the inclusion of this phrase aligns the inscription on the Narses Cross with contemporary inscriptions in Greek, it should be noted that the latter omit the word for soul. The Armenian inscription on the Narses Cross and early medieval lapidary Armenian inscriptions reveal a clear preference for retaining this word.

Given the dearth of securely dated Armenian manuscripts earlier than the ninth century, the opportunity for palaeographical comparison is limited once more to the corpus of lapidary and mosaic inscriptions referred to previously. Overall there is a significant proximity between the well-rounded, upright *erkat'agir* uncials of the Narses Cross and the characters depicted in those inscriptions. Thus the *ayb* [U]

found on the Narses Cross is composed of two vertical strokes joined at the base by a thin curved line, the right-hand vertical containing a pronounced loop and a tail extending to the right, at an angle. This form is a prominent feature of several Armenian mosaic inscriptions unearthed in Jerusalem, most notably the Musrara Bird mosaic (fig. 7).<sup>26</sup> Conventionally, and on decorative and artistic rather than palaeographical grounds, this mosaic is dated to the sixth century. The *ho* [Z] carved on the Narses Cross is formed by two lines, one carved at an angle of 45° from right to left, and then from left to right again at an angle of 135°, forming an equilateral angle, with a short vertical tag added to this lower line. Once more, very similar forms can be found in the Musrara mosaic. Over time, the angle within this character changed, the vertical tag grew in length, and it became increasingly segmented, with a hook added to the top. None of these later features are found in the Narses Cross. And finally the *vew* [V] is formed in the Narses Cross inscription by two uprights of equal height, joined at the bottom by a curved line, with a tail extending to the right. This equality in height is an archaic form, again illustrated in the Musrara inscription.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from these similarities, it is also clear that there are also unusual features in the letter forms employed on the Narses Cross. The *nu* [N] in particular displays great variation across the whole inscription. The character normally consists of a vertical upright, topped with a small bar to the left—which over time increasingly turned upward to form a hook—and at the bottom, a curved line, linked to a second, shorter upright. The first *nu* in the inscription—the eighth character down on the right-hand vertical of the upper arm—is slightly smaller than the surrounding characters and seems unduly compressed; the vertical upright is curved and gives the appearance

22 Ibid., 54–61.

23 Ibid., 59 and B.4.

24 T'ovma Arcruni, *Patmut'iwn Tann Arcrunec'*, ed. K'. Patkanean (St. Petersburg, 1887; repr. Tiflis, 1917; facsimile reproduction Delmar, NY, 1991), 228.16–20; English translation and commentary by R. W. Thomson, *History of the House of the Artsrunik'* (Detroit, 1985), 291.

25 Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, nos. 15 (Walters Art Gallery, no. 57.639), 33–36, 37 (Abegg Stiftung, Bern, no. 8.112.64), 38 (Abegg Stiftung, Bern, no. 8.113.64), and 41; Boyd, "Metropolitan Treasure," nos. 4, 5, 23a, 23c (Archaeological Museum, Antalya, unnumbered), 44 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1965.1.19,a–c), 45 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1979.10, a–d), and 61 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1963.36.11, d).

26 S. Der Nersessian, *Armenian Art* (London, 1978), fig. 45; M. E. Stone, "A Reassessment of the Bird and Eustathius Mosaics," in *The Armenians in Jerusalem and the Holy Land*, ed. M. E. Stone, R. R. Irvine, and N. Stone, Hebrew University Armenian Studies 4 (Leuven, 2002), 203–19 and fig. 9. Greenwood, "Corpus," B.1; S. N. Mouraviev, *Erkataguir ou comment naquit l'alphabet arménien* (Sankt Augustin, 2010), no. 2.

27 For a full study of the archaic forms of the letters, see M. E. Stone, "The Development of Armenian Writing," in M. E. Stone, D. Kouymjian, and H. Lehmann, *Album of Armenian Paleography* (Aarhus, 2002), 77–105.



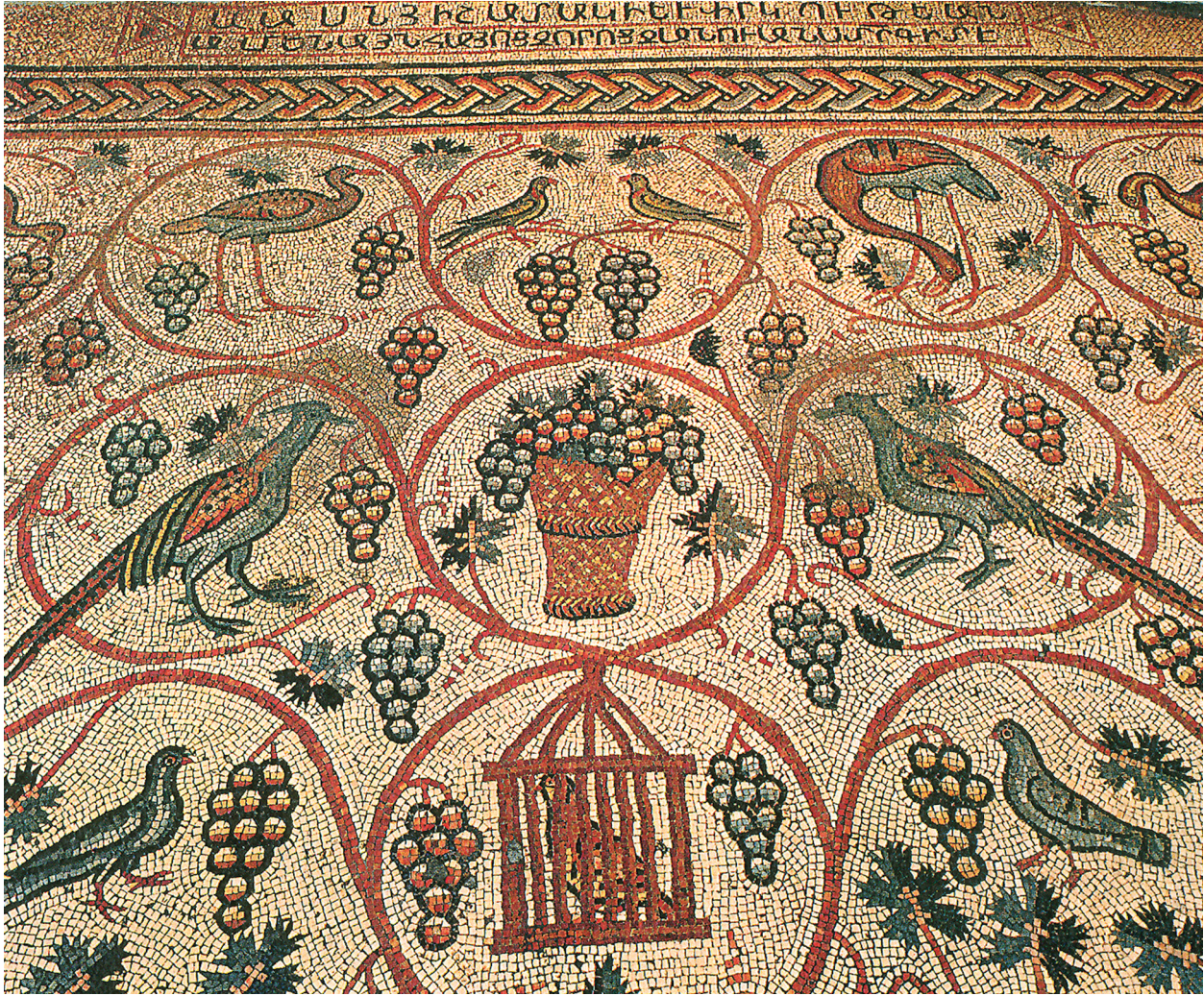


FIG. 7 The Musrara Bird Mosaic in Jerusalem

of a *ša* [Շ]. This is even more pronounced in the final *nu* encountered, immediately below the single raised character on the right lateral arm. With its bar extending to the right of the curved vertical upright, this also resembles a *ša* rather than a *nu*. Furthermore, the bar on the first *nu* on the left hand vertical of the upper arm, the eleventh character, extends to the left of the vertical upright but then turns down, an additional and wholly anomalous component. There is no obvious technical reason why the engraver should have had such difficulty in producing this character. If, however, the engraver did not know Armenian, and was working from a template which displayed a range

of shapes for this character, he may not have realized that these characters were all supposed to be the same.

This contention, that the engraver did not know Armenian, is supported by the evident, if understandable, confusion between *ini* [հ]—with its curved horizontal bar protruding half way down the vertical—and *hiwn* [հ] which in the earliest inscriptions displays a straight horizontal bar half way down the vertical. Both forms are found in the Narses Cross but they are not used consistently. For example, the character on the right hand vertical of the upper arm immediately above the cabochon should be an *ini* but resembles a *hiwn*; the tenth character on the left hand vertical of the lower arm should be an *ini* but again



looks like a *hiwn*. The engraver was capable of carving an *ini* correctly, as the fifth character on the upper horizontal of the right arm confirms. The eighth character on the left hand vertical of the upper arm also looks to be miscarved, the *ec'* [b] overlying a character with a rounded aspect in its upper right-hand quadrant, possibly *yi* [β] or *c'o* [δ]. It seems highly likely that the engraver was not familiar with the Armenian character set.

In summary, there is no linguistic or palaeographical reason why this inscription should not date from late antiquity. Indeed there is a striking proximity between several of the letter forms found in this inscription and characters in the Armenian inscription labelling the sixth-century Musrara Bird Mosaic in Jerusalem.

### *The Identity of the Sponsor*

The inscription reveals that the Cross was made, in the sense of being commissioned by a figure named Nerseh. According to Hrač'ey Ačārean, this name is not attested after the ninth century.<sup>28</sup> This provides a very broad terminus ante quem of ca. 900.

Nerseh identifies himself in three ways. First, he titles himself *koms*, that is, *komes*, a title, originally Latin, associated in the East Roman Empire in the sixth and seventh centuries with a variety of civil and military offices, some of which were important, others less so.<sup>29</sup> Nerseh does not specify exactly which office he held. In the sixth century, however, the majority of Armenians attracted into imperial service from outside the Empire enjoyed careers in the Byzantine army. Second, Nerseh defines himself as *p'ar*. Again the meaning of this word is not straightforward. One solution is to suggest that his name was not Nerseh but P'arnerseh. This is an extremely rare name in Armenian, and relying on Ačārean once more, only one individual with this name can be identified, a fourth-century Katholikos of Armenia.<sup>30</sup> An alternative solution is to treat *p'ar* as an abbreviation of

*p'arawor*, that is, glorious or illustrious, and perhaps therefore a calque on *gloriosus* or *gloriosissimus*, in Greek ἐνδοξότατος.<sup>31</sup> Just as this honorific title was abbreviated to *glor*, so it is possible that the Armenian calque was abbreviated to *p'ar*.

The use of *koms/komes*—and perhaps *p'ar/glor*—indicate that Nerseh thought of himself as belonging to, and having status within, the East Roman Empire. *Koms* has no meaning in a purely Armenian context. On the other hand, the very fact that he called himself Nerseh, rather than the Greek Narses, and that he commissioned a dedicatory inscription in Armenian rather than Greek, reveals that his Armenian background remained very significant for him. This is confirmed by the third way in which Nerseh elected to define himself. By dedicating the cross “for the peace and prosperity of Armenian houses and our villages and the family of Xorxoṛunik,” Nerseh reveals his Armenian ancestry and more specifically his own family background. Nerseh was a member of the princely family of Xorxoṛunik'.

What do we know about the Xorxoṛuni house? No dedicated history for this princely family survives and our knowledge is therefore limited to incidental references in other historical compositions. Members of this family tend to feature as participants in some wider enterprise and are rarely given center stage. This does not mean that they never played such a leading role but that the surviving sources do not present them in this way. Arguably the past was as contested as the present, with those families which did not survive into the medieval period liable to be relegated to minor roles in another family's history or forgotten altogether. Although the extent to which historical traditions associated with one family were recycled by another remains unclear, it is possible that after their demise, the Xorxoṛuni traditions were appropriated by another house. More probably there was no interest, purpose, or means of preserving their family history and so these traditions were lost.

The earliest reference to a member of the Xorxoṛuni house, Manasp, occurs in the late fifth-century Armenian epic known as the *Buzandaran*

28 H. H. Ačārean, *Hayoc' Anjannunneri Baṛaran*, 5 vols. (Erevan, 1942–62), 4:34: Nerseh 24.

29 By the sixth century, there was a considerable gulf in status between the single *komes sacrarum largitionum*, in charge of the imperial finances, and the many *komites rei militaris*, military officers in charge of army units; see *ODB* 1:484–86.

30 Ačārean, *Hayoc' Anjannunneri Baṛaran*, 5:192.

31 J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* (Cambridge, 1990), 162–65 and 390–91; *ODB* 2:855.

*Patmut'iwnk'*.<sup>32</sup> The latest reference appears to be to one Vahram Xorxoṛuni, who was a signatory to the canons of the Council of Partav in 768, held just before the series of failed Armenian rebellions in the mid-770s which so disturbed the social order.<sup>33</sup> Thereafter the Xorxoṛuni house disappears from view and it is tempting to speculate that it was permanently displaced during this period of turmoil. If so, the approximate terminus ante quem for the manufacture of the Narses Cross shifts back into the last quarter of the eighth century.

The richest source for the history of the Xorxoṛunik' is the mid-seventh century *History Attributed to Sebēos*, a work whose historical coverage begins in 572 and extends to 655 CE, with several updating notices inserted in ca. 661.<sup>34</sup> Three members of the Xorxoṛuni house appear suddenly, but fleetingly, in this historical narrative.<sup>35</sup> Atat Xorxoṛuni was one of several desperate Armenian rebels in the mid-590s who mounted a chaotic uprising in protest, it seems, at the close cooperation between the East Roman emperor Maurice and his protégé, recently established as *šahanšah* in Persia, Khusro II.<sup>36</sup> Atat eventually submitted to Maurice and was sent on campaign to Thrace against the Avars. Here he was granted the imperial title of *patrikios* but then fled back to Armenia while Maurice was still emperor and entered the service of Khusro II. After Maurice's murder in late 602, Atat reportedly tried to switch sides again but he was caught, bound, and beaten to death.<sup>37</sup>

Atat's relationship to the second figure, T'ēodos Xorxoṛuni is unknown. T'ēodos was a conspicuously loyal client of the East Roman Empire during the reign of Maurice's successor, Phokas. He established a defensive position at Angl in the district of Calkot'n in 605, when Khusro II was campaigning in Armenia, and submitted to the Persians only after a fiercely fought battle. Although he was richly rewarded by Khusro II, according to Sebēos, he was later suspected of treachery and killed.<sup>38</sup> The third figure, Vahan Xorxoṛuni, comes from a later generation and once more his relationship to Atat and T'ēodos remains obscure. Vahan emerges into the historical narrative from nowhere, as one implicated in the plot of Athalarikos against his father Heraclius in ca. 637 and sent into exile after its failure.<sup>39</sup> Equally unexpectedly, we learn that he was rehabilitated under Constans II in 645/46.<sup>40</sup> He then vanishes once more. It is also worth noting in passing that according to Sebēos, "the Xorxoṛuni" attended upon Constans II in 652 when he advanced to Theodosiopolis.<sup>41</sup> It is unclear whether this means one figure or stands for the family as a whole.

Members of the Xorxoṛuni house therefore served in imperial armies during the reigns of Maurice, Phokas, and Constans II as well as participating in a coup against Heraclius. Tellingly, however, both Atat and T'ēodos also served Sasanian Persia. The Xorxoṛuni lands have traditionally been identified as located along the upper Aracani River, in the very center of historic Armenia, a strategically sensitive zone for both Rome and Persia in the last quarter of the sixth century and the first decades of the seventh century.<sup>42</sup>

32 *P'awstosi Buzandac'woy Patmut'iwn Hayoc'*, 2nd rev. ed. (Venice, 1889), 29; English translation by N. G. Garsoïan, *The Epic Histories Attributed to P'awstos Buzand (Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk')*, Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies 8 (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 3.12.

33 *Kanonagirk' Hayoc'*, ed. V. Hakobyan, 2 vols. (Erevan, 1964–71), 2:5; French translation and commentary by A. Mardirossian, "Les canons du synode de Partaw (768)," *REArm* 27 (1998–2000): 121.

34 For further discussion, see R. W. Thomson and J. D. Howard-Johnston, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, TTH 31, 2 vols. (Liverpool, 1999) 1, xi–lxxii; T. W. Greenwood, "Sasanian Echoes and Apocalyptic Expectations: A Re-evaluation of the Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos," *Le Muséon* 115, nos. 3–4 (2002): 323–97; and J. D. Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis* (Oxford, 2011), 70–102.

35 Thomson and Howard-Johnston, *Sebeos*, 334.

36 Sebēos 87.12–88.35; Ačārean, *Hayoc' Anjnanunneri Ba'aran* (n. 28 above), 1:253; Atat 3.

37 Sebēos 104.22–105.20.

38 Sebēos 109.6–110.4. Ačārean, *Hayoc' Anjnanunneri Ba'aran*, 2:292; T'ēodos 3.

39 Sebēos 133.1–23. Ačārean, *Hayoc' Anjnanunneri Ba'aran*, 5:13; Vahan 31.

40 Sebēos 143.11–19.

41 Sebēos 165.15–24.

42 According to the Short Recension of the *Ašxarhač'oyc'*, a revised version of an Armenian geographical composition attributed to Anania Širakac'i and dated to the middle of the seventh century, the district of Xorxoṛunik' was one of the sixteen districts of the land, *ašxarh*, of Taruberan, which lay to the north and west of Lake Van: "Širakac'u Ašxarhač'oyc'č," in Abrahamyan, *Anania Širakac'u Matenagrut'yunč* (n. 1 above), 349.22–3; R. H. Hews, *The Geography of Ananias of Širak (Ašxarhač'oyc'): The Long and Short Recensions*, Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen

Perhaps we should not be surprised at their political flexibility, as members of the family found themselves squeezed between the two great powers, trying to hold onto their lands by negotiating with one or other of them and sometimes, one suspects, both at the same time. This volatility was also expressed in ecclesiastical terms. In 607, the bishop of the Xorxoṛunik', Movsēs, with four other bishops and nineteen abbots, came to terms with the head of the Armenian Church, the Katholikos Abraham, repudiating their obedience to the patriarch of Constantinople and being readmitted to the Armenian Church.<sup>43</sup> Their decision to switch allegiance was prompted by the recent expulsion of Roman forces from Armenia, defeated and driven out by the Persians. These notices therefore all demonstrate Xorxoṛuni engagement with the East Roman Empire from the end of the sixth century, an engagement characterized by military service, as well as a Xorxoṛuni presence in central Armenia. Such a general context suits the commissioning of the Narses Cross but it should be reiterated that none of the surviving Armenian sources refer to a Nerseh Xorxoṛuni.

This being so, do the contemporary sources from within the East Roman Empire lend any assistance? A search for the Greek equivalent of Nerseh, Narses, in *PLRE* reveals twelve individuals bearing that name. None of them are further identified as members of the Xorxoṛuni house, or indeed any other Armenian family. Consequently it is never going to be possible to equate the sponsor of the Narses Cross with any one of the twelve. Nevertheless one can make the case for identifying the sponsor with one of the following four figures.

The best-known of the twelve is Narses 1 the eunuch, the loyal servant and later general of Justinian I who fought predominantly in Italy against the Goths and died in Rome in 573/74 at a very great age.<sup>44</sup> He is described on an inscription in Rome dated to 565 as *vir gloriosissimus*, which could be connected to the

Armenian *p'ar* discussed above.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, there is no trace that he ever held an office incorporating the title *komes*. Admittedly we do not have full details of his career in imperial service and it is possible that he held such an office at some stage; almost a century ago Ernst Stein suggested that Narses 1 held the office of *komes sacrarum largitionum* but this identification was doubted by John Bury and the latter's view has prevailed.<sup>46</sup>

More promising, perhaps, is Narses 2, who is described by Procopius as a Persarmenian, someone who originally came from that part of Armenia under Persian control.<sup>47</sup> When Procopius was writing, the Xorxoṛuni lands were indeed in the Persian sector. Narses 2 may have held the rank of *komes rei militaris* in Italy between 538 and 540 and then in the East in 543. He first came to the attention of the Romans in the late 520s, according to Procopius, when he fought with his brother Aratius against Belisarius and Sittas.<sup>48</sup> Procopius also records that Narses 2 was killed fighting the Persians at Anglon in 543.<sup>49</sup> Coincidentally, or otherwise, some sixty years later, in 605 according to Sebēos, T'ēodos Xorxoṛuni fought the Persians at the very same location, Angl/Anglon.<sup>50</sup> Moreover this is close to the region traditionally identified as belonging to the Xorxoṛuni house. If we accept that the sponsor of the cross, Nerseh *komes*, a member of the Xorxoṛuni house, and Narses 2, *komes*, killed at Anglon in 543, are one and the same person, it follows that the Narses Cross is likely to have been commissioned in the five years after Narses 2 was appointed to the rank of *komes* in 538 and before his death in 543.

Against this attractive thesis, however, is the longstanding tradition that Narses 2, along with his brothers Aratius (Armenian Hrahat) and Isaac (Armenian Sahak), were members of the Kamsarakan

Orients, Reihe B Nr. 77 (Wiesbaden, 1991), 63A and n. 138A. Although it is identified as being situated to the north of Lake Van, its exact location and its relationship to the surrounding districts remains unclear.

43 *Girk' T'it'oc'*, ed. Y. Izmireanc' (Tiflis, 1901), 151.17–18; French translation by N. Garsoïan, *L'église arménienne et le grand Schisme d'Orient* CSCO 574, Subs. 100 (Leuven, 1999), 514.

44 *PLRE* 912–28.

45 *CIL* 4:1199: *Narses vir gloriosissimus, ex praeposito. . . atque patricius*.

46 E. Stein, *Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Reiches: Vornehmlich unter den Kaisern Justinus II u. Tiberius Constantinus* (Stuttgart, 1919), 163; J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire* (London, 1923), 47, n. 117. I am grateful to Mr. Y. Petsopoulos for this reference.

47 *PLRE* 928–30; Ačaṙean, *Hayoc' Anjnanunneri Baṛaran* (n. 28 above), 4:32: Nerseh 13.

48 Procopius, *Wars*, 1.12.21–22 and 1.15.31.

49 Procopius, *Wars*, 2.25.5–24.

50 Sebēos 109.3–110.4.

family, not the Xorxoruni. This depends principally on the existence in a previous generation of three Kamsarakan brothers bearing exactly the same names, Nerseh, Hrahat and Sahak. They fought loyally on the side of Vahan Mamikonean during his rebellion against the Persians in 483 CE; this episode was recorded in great detail some two decades after the events by the Armenian historian Łazar P'arpec'i in the third book of his *History*.<sup>51</sup> Moreover it is telling that Łazar describes how the wives of Nerseh and Hrahat were seized during the fighting and imprisoned "in the strong fortress of Basean which is called Bołberd."<sup>52</sup> Procopius comments that Isaac delivered the fortress of Bolum to the Romans when he switched sides in 530 and there seems little doubt that this is the same fortress.<sup>53</sup> Bolum was situated close to Theodosiopolis, in the district of Basean, in what has usually been taken to be Kamsarakan territory. This evidence—the similarity in naming practices and the association with Bołberd/Bolum—strongly suggests that Narses 2 was indeed a Kamsarakan rather than a Xorxoruni. If so, he cannot have been the sponsor of the Narses Cross.

The third candidate is Narses 4, the favorite of Justin II who is credited with extensive building works in the city of Constantinople.<sup>54</sup> An inscription records his role in restoring the outer Theodosian wall and refers to him as ἐνδοξότατος σπαθάριος and σακελλάριος.<sup>55</sup> John of Ephesus records that one *gloriosus Narses spatharius* died in 581 while traveling on a diplomatic mission to the Avars and it seems almost certain that this is the same person.<sup>56</sup> Narses 4 is therefore a figure with the right honorific title and with

strong ties to, and connections within, Constantinople. Moreover Theophanes identifies him as *cubicularius*, and hence a eunuch; the possible significance of this will become apparent below.<sup>57</sup> Frustratingly, however, he is not attested as *komes*.

The final figure is Narses 10, the commander of Constantina during the reign of Maurice who later served as the emperor's bodyguard.<sup>58</sup> He led the army which restored Khusr II to power in 591; this is known to have included significant numbers of Armenian soldiers.<sup>59</sup> After the murder of Maurice in November 602, he led a rebellion against Phokas from the city of Edessa. The city was besieged and eventually fell in 604, following which he was captured and killed.<sup>60</sup> Once again, Narses 10 is a figure with excellent imperial contacts, high office and a military career; he is not however recorded as either *gloriosus* or *komes*. On the other hand, he does feature in the *History Attributed to Sebēos* more prominently than one might have anticipated through notices reporting the actions of 591 and 602.<sup>61</sup> The attention afforded within the text to three members of the Xorxoruni family was noted above. Narses 10 is not, however, identified as a member of the Xorxoruni family or indeed as Armenian, despite his name.

51 Łazar P'arpec'i, *Patmut'iwn Hayoc' ev T'ult' ar Vahan Mamikonean*, ed. G. Tēr-Mkrtč'ean and S. Malxasean (Tiflis, 1904; repr. Delmar, NY, 1985), 129.23–24. English translation and commentary by R. W. Thomson, *The History of Łazar P'arpec'i*, Occasional Papers and Proceedings 4 (Atlanta, GA, 1991), §71. This similarity was noted by Ernest Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, vol. 2, *De la disparition de l'empire occidental à la mort de Justinien (476–565)* (Paris, 1949), 292 and n. 1.

52 Łazar P'arpec'i 146.30–1; Thomson, *History of Łazar*, §80.

53 Procopius, *Wars*, 1.15.32–33.

54 PLRE 930–31.

55 I. Ševčenko, "The Inscription of Justin II's Time on the Mevlevihane (Rhesion) Gate in Istanbul," *ZRVI* 12 (1970): 1–8.

56 John of Ephesus, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae pars tertia*, ed. and trans. E. W. Brooks CSCO 106 (Louvain, 1955), 6.31, p. 254.

57 Theophanes refers to Narses as *cubicularius* and *protospatharius* under AM 6063 (570/71): *Theophanis Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883–1885), 244; English translation and commentary by C. Mango and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284–813* (Oxford, 1997), 360 and n. 1.

58 PLRE 933–35; Ačařean, *Hayoc' Anjnanunneri Bařaran* (n. 8 above), 4:32; Nerseh 14. Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, ed. C. de Boor; rev. P. Wirth (Stuttgart, 1972), 3.1.1; English translation and commentary by M. Whitby and M. Whitby, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta* (Oxford, 1986), 72.

59 Theophylact 5.4.3 and 5.8.1–10.11 for the actions of Narses 10; Theophylact 5.8.9 and Sebēos 76.33–79.6 for the Armenian troops fighting on Khusr II's side.

60 Sebēos 106.30–107.25 for his rebellion and death in Edessa. Theophanes also reports his rebellion AM 6095 (602/3): *Theophanis Chronographia*, 291; Mango and Scott, *Chronicle of Theophanes*, 419. However Theophanes notes that Narses then fled to Hierapolis and in 6097 (604/5) was induced by Domentziolos to go under safe conduct to Phokas, who then burned him alive: *Theophanis Chronographia*, 292–93; Mango and Scott, *Chronicle of Theophanes*, 420–21.

61 Sebēos 77.1–2, where he is described as Nersēs *stratelat*, a transliteration of the Greek.



It seems very unlikely that it is ever going to be possible to prove that the sponsor of the Cross, Nerseh Xorxoṛuni, was one and the same as any of the figures called Narses outlined above. Setting the issue of identity to one side, however, there is another dimension to the Xorxoṛuni connection. If anyone were intending to fabricate a late antique silver cross with an Armenian inscription, in my view one would wish to associate it with a prominent Armenian family, either the Mamikoneank' or the Bagratunik'. One would not naturally select a little-known house such as the Xorxoṛunik'. Quite apart from the manufacture, design, decoration, and the palaeography of the Armenian characters, all of which point to a late antique date, the unexpected connection with the Xorxoṛuni family supports the authenticity of the Narses Cross.

### *The Location of the Church*

The inscription states that Nerseh commissioned the cross for a church dedicated to St. Step'anos (the protomartyr). By itself, this is not sufficient to identify the location. To give an impression of the saint's popularity, there were at least twenty-six monasteries dedicated to Step'anos in the medieval period and this is without reckoning the individual churches and chapels which would have been dedicated to him as well.<sup>62</sup> More promisingly the inscription also reveals that this church was in the village of P'arakert, literally "gloriously built." There are three possible sites.

The first is the village of P'arakert, located in the district of Boḥnop'or in the northern region of Greater Armenia called Gugark'.<sup>63</sup> Although this is identical to that inscribed on the Narses Cross, it lies some three hundred fifty kilometers northeast from where

the Xorxoṛuni lands have traditionally been located. Admittedly it is very unclear in what capacity princely houses held estates and where these were held. The usual picture, of a consolidated territory based on the possession of villages and estates within a district or districts, may be an oversimplification. If this was the location of the church, its distance from the Xorxoṛuni heartlands is surprising.

The second candidate is the village of P'aražnakert, located in the district of Nig, on the river Kasal in the historic region of Ayrarat.<sup>64</sup> This is further south than the previous site but still two hundred fifty kilometers from the Xorxoṛuni lands. This site is now submerged beneath the Aparan Reservoir. The third possible site is the village of P'araxot, located in the district of Maseac'otn, northeast of the districts of Kogovit and Caḱkotn, again in the region of Ayrarat.<sup>65</sup> This site is closer still to the presumed Xorxoṛuni heartlands but still approximately eighty kilometers away. None of these can be positively identified as the location of the church with any degree of confidence. When set alongside the challenges of historical Armenian toponymy, it seems highly unlikely that the original destination of the Narses Cross will ever be established.

### *The Range of the Dedication*

One of the surprising features of the inscription on the Narses Cross is the wide ambit of its invocation. Not only was the Cross given for the remission of the sins of the unworthy Nerseh; it was also given for the repose of his deceased relatives and for the peace and prosperity of three other groups who were very

62 M. Thierry, *Répertoire des monastères arméniens* (Turnhout, 1993), 235–36. The date and circumstances in which the majority of these monasteries were founded remain obscure.

63 The district of Boḥnop'or is included in the definition of the country of Virk'/Iberia preserved in the Long Recension of the *Ašxarhač'oyc'*, which is usually attributed to the first half of the seventh century: *Ašxarhač'oyc' Movsesi Xorenac'woy: Géographie de Moïse de Corène*, ed. and trans. A. Soukry (Venice, 1881; facsimile reproduction, with new introduction by R. H. Hewsen, Delmar, NY, 1994), 28.13–14; Hewsen, *Geography* (n. 42 above), 57 and n. 34. The text adds that this district had been taken from Armenia. It formed part of the contested frontier between Armenia and eastern Georgia. See idem, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (Chicago, 2001), map 55, B5 for the proposed location of the village south of Bolnis.

64 The district of Nig is included in the definition of the sixteen districts of the land of Ayrarat preserved in the Long Recension of the *Ašxarhač'oyc': Ašxarhač'oyc'*, ed. Soukry, 34.10; Hewsen, *Geography* (n. 42 above), 70 and n. 293. See Hewsen, *Armenia*, map 55, C5, for the location of P'aražnakert.

65 Maseac'otn is identified in the Short Recension of the *Ašxarhač'oyc'* as one of the twenty districts found in Ayrarat: "Širakac'u Ašxarhač'oyc'č," 350.39; Hewsen, *Geography*, 70A and n. 181A; idem, *Armenia*, map 55, E5 for the location of P'araxot. It is called Paracata in the Tabula Peutingeriana: K. Miller, *Itineraria Romana: Römische Reisewege an der Hand der Tabula Peutingeriana* (Stuttgart, 1916), Strecke 95, col. 677 and fig. 242. For a reproduction of the map, see idem, *Die Peutingersche Tafel* (Stuttgart, 1916), Segmentum XI.4; reproduced in Hewsen, *Armenia*, map 58 and its content reflected in map 59, including the location of Paracata at C5.

much alive, namely other Armenian princely houses, “our villages,” and other unspecified members of the Xorxoṛuni house. Let us examine each of these elements in turn.<sup>66</sup>

As we have seen above, making a pious donation in the expectation that this would assist the rest or repose of the souls of one’s fathers and ancestors is not otherwise found in early medieval Armenian literature or inscriptions although it is expressed in contemporary inscriptions in Greek. Instead one normally finds a donor remembering his immediate family, his wife and children. At T’alin for example, Nerseh *apohipat patrik*, lord of Širak and Ašarunik’, “built this church in the name of the Holy Mother of God for the intercession of me and Šušan my wife and Hrahat our son.”<sup>67</sup> If there is any pattern to be discerned—and the sample is too small to be confident—it seems to be that clerical founders did not invoke any wider benefit for their families or communities but that lay founders invariably did.<sup>68</sup> This raises the intriguing possibility that Nerseh Xorxoṛuni did not mention his wife or children because he was a eunuch and had neither.<sup>69</sup> After all, two of the figures discussed above—Narses 1 and Narses 4—were eunuchs. Again this contention is incapable of proof. No less intriguing is the fact that the sponsor remembered his wider family fourth and last in his list, after other Armenian houses and his villages. If the sequence reflects the relative importance of the beneficiaries to the donor, one wonders why his wider family were apparently so distant.

Praying for the peace and prosperity of other Armenian houses is, to my knowledge, unique. Lay

patrons were often concerned about the material and spiritual well-being of their immediate family members but gave no thought to rival princely families. Articulating concern for them may reflect awareness on the part of Nerseh that all the noble houses of Armenia were experiencing turmoil at the time. Even if it did so, however, this does not help in establishing the date of manufacture, given the volatile political and social circumstances operating across the districts of Armenia throughout much of the second half of the sixth century, into the first half of the seventh and beyond. Greater Armenia was repeatedly a theater of engagement between Rome and Persia and later between Byzantine and Arab forces, so one could make the case for different decades with equal conviction.<sup>70</sup> There is, however, one Armenian inscription which also contemplates a wider social range, although not in precisely the same terms. The sixth-century Musrara inscription in Jerusalem states that it was fashioned *vasn yištaki ew p’rkuṭ’ean amenayn Hayoć zoroć zanuans Tēr gitē*, “in memory of and for the redemption of all Armenians whose names the Lord knows.”<sup>71</sup> The final phrase in this inscription is found in Greek on two chalices in the Sion Treasure and once in Mango’s catalogue, which might suggest rarity but, as Ihor Ševčenko has observed, the phrase is “well known in Christian epigraphy, both western and eastern . . . on floor and wall mosaics, on a baptismal font and on objects” including censers and crosses; most of these seem to date from the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>72</sup> The phrase “all Armenians” was thought to be exceptional but now finds partial correspondence with the Narses Cross. Both inscriptions attest a contemporary awareness of Armenian identity albeit in slightly different ways. Nerseh Xorxoṛuni extended the benefits of his donation to other noble Armenian families, constructing Armenian identity

66 It is possible to trace the association of the Cross with votive prayers in later medieval Armenian manuscripts. See, for example, the colophon in M5547, at fol. 7a, located at the foot of the Cross which is depicted with four equal, flared arms, set within a double circle, above a column on steps. The colophon reads “I beg [you] to remember the steeped-in-sin and least monk [*krōnawor*] Gēorg, the maker of this manuscript, and may Christ grant [you] delight, Amen.” For the full-page miniature, see T. A. Izmaïlova, *Armianskaia miniatiura “XI” veka* (Moscow, 1979), fig. 19; for the colophon, see A. S. Mat’evosyan, *Hayeren Jeṛagreri Hišatakaraner* (Erevan, 1988), no. 55 (c), although he dates it to the ninth century.

67 Greenwood, “Corpus,” (n. 21 above), A.12.

68 Ibid., 54–57, where this argument is developed.

69 If Nerseh had been widowed, or his children had predeceased him, one might have expected them to be named in the first category, with the souls of his fathers and ancestors.

70 Conflict between Rome and Persia extended over the central districts of Armenia in the 540s, 570s and between 602 and 607. The period of good relations in the 590s on the other hand allowed them to act in concert and strip Armenia of its military resources, compelling its leading figures to campaign on distant frontiers.

71 Greenwood, “Corpus,” B.1.

72 Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium* (n. 4 above), no. 74 (F. Alouf Collection, Beirut); Boyd, “Metropolitan Treasure” (n. 8 above), nos. 9 and 10. For a wider discussion of the formula, see I. Ševčenko, “The Sion Treasure: The Evidence of the Inscriptions,” in Boyd and Mango, *Ecclesiastical Silver* (n. 8 above), 42.



FIG. 8 The Foundation Inscription at Mren (photograph by Steve Sims)

in terms of the elite. The Musrara mosaic however envisages that all the donors who contributed to its manufacture were Armenian; this is not an invocation for all Armenians anywhere in place or time but rather the language of self-effacement and anonymity. Intriguingly both the Narses Cross and the Musrara mosaic were conceived, commissioned, and manufactured in predominantly non-Armenian cultural contexts. This seems to reveal something about the manifestation of Armenian identity.

On the other hand, praying for village communities is not without precedent. The inscription at Mren (fig. 8), dated to the late 630s, concludes with an invocation for the princely family of Kamsarakan, the village of Mren, and a third and final group who cannot be identified because of the damaged state of the end of the inscription.<sup>73</sup> In an earlier study, I suggested that the inscription had originally read [*i barexaws*]ut*’iwn*, “for the intercession” of those listed; the uncertain reading was caused by separate damage to the middle of the inscription. On the basis of comparison with the reconstruction of the preceding two lines, however, and given the space available, it appears more likely that no more than six characters could fit the gap. Since the Narses Cross and the Second Divriği Cross, discussed below, both refer to *šinut’iwn*, “prosperity” in relation to families and villages, it seems more likely that the Mren inscription too contained this expression, hence [*i šin*]ut*’iwn*. The following is a corrected and revised reading and translation of this inscription.

[—]ՈՐԴԻ ՀԵՐԱԿՂԻ ԲԱՐԵՅԱՂԹՈՂ  
ԹԱԳԱՒՈՐԻ ՅԻՇԽԱՆՈՒԹԵ[ԱՆՆ Ա]  
ՄԵՆԱԳՈՎ ՊԱՏՐԿԻ ԿՈՒՐԱՊԱՆԱՏԻ ԵՒ  
ՍՊԱՐԱ[ՊԵՏ] /

[Ի ՀԱՅ]ՈՑ ԵՒ ԱՍՈՐԻՈՑ ԵՒ  
ՅԵՊԻՍԿՈՊՈՍՈՒԹԵԱՆՆ ՍՐԲԱ[ՍԷՐ ԹԵ]  
ՈՎԹԻՂՈՍԻ ԵՒ Ի ՏԱՆՈՒՏԵՐՈՒԹԵԱՆ  
ՆԵՐՍԵ[ՀԻ] /

[ՇԻՐԱ]ԿԱՅ ԵՒ ԱՇԱՐՈՒՆԵԱՅ ՏԵԱՌՆ  
ՇԻՆԵՑԱԻ ՍՈՒՐԲ ԵԿԵՂԵՑ[ԻՍ Ի ՇԻՆ]  
ՈՒԹԻՒՆ ԿԱՄՍԱՐԱԿԱՆԱՅ ԵՒ ՄՐԵՆՈՑ  
ԵՒ ԱՄԵՆԱ[ՅՆ—] /

[—] of the victorious king Heraclius, in the office of prince of the all-praiseworthy *patrik*, *kourapatat*, and *sparapet* [of Armenia] and Syria and in the office of bishop of the pious T’ēovp’ilos and in the office of *tanutēr* of Nerseh, lord of [Širak] and Ašarunik’ this holy church was built [for the prosperity] of the Kamsarakank’ and Mren and all [—]

The third group of beneficiaries described in the Mren inscription remains unidentified. While the word begins *amen*[...] and has been read *amen*[*ayn*], “all,” or perhaps *amen*[*ec’unc’*], “everyone,” the meaning of this collective phrase is obscure.<sup>74</sup>

74 The inscription is damaged in three places. Although it is impossible to determine with complete confidence how many characters have been lost at the start, in the middle and at the end of the inscription, the revised reconstruction depends upon three particular features of the inscription in its current state: the presence or absence of broken characters at the start or end of a block, the relationship of the blocks which carry the inscription with the

73 Greenwood, “Corpus,” 36, 66–67 and A.7.



Let us return to the Narses Cross. Despite the sponsor's service within the East Roman Empire, reflected in his title *komes*, the terms of his invocation shows that he had not forgotten where he had come from, either in terms of background or cultural tradition. His Xorxoruni family ties, viewed in terms of his ancestors and his living relatives, continued to hold meaning and significance. Indeed Nerseh's decision to have the cross inscribed in Armenian rather than Greek characters and then donated to a village church somewhere in Armenia shows how his Armenian heritage was central to his sense of who he was.



Having considered the design and manufacture of the Narses Cross, together with its Armenian inscription, let us now turn to the two other pieces of silverware which carry Armenian inscriptions. Aside from their individual significance, these also serve to further contextualize the Narses Cross.

surrounding blocks, and the position of the window in the façade as a mid-point. Since the inscription is carved onto blocks of different sizes, the dimensions of each block cannot be used to determine the number of missing characters. Using the surrounding blocks as a guide, the missing opening block was of relatively small dimension and may have carried three or four characters only. The first line may have opened with a cross and then supplied the regnal year of Heraclius, hence [+h h.], "[In the 2\*]th of the victorious king Heraclius . . ." This in turn suggests that only three or four characters are missing from the start of each line. Moving across, the final characters on the block before the window are all complete but those on the first block after the red geometric-patterned insert are broken. This suggests that the original inscription was interrupted by the aperture—an anticipated interruption—but that first block after the aperture was damaged by the insertion of the right-hand *xač'kar* and the fragment of geometric decoration. In this instance, the second line provides the best diagnostic. The compound adjective ՍՐՔԱ[. . .] qualifies bishop Դ'ԵՈՎ'ԻԼՈՍ. Since Heraclius and the anonymous *patrikios* and *curopalates* are both accorded one epithet each, one can assume that the bishop too had one epithet. Therefore the second line implies that only five or six characters are missing from the middle of the inscription. The characters at the end of the inscriptions are again partial, suggesting that part of this block, or a separate block, has been lost. The suggested readings for lines one and two indicate that no more than three or four characters have been lost.

## The First Divriği Cross

### *Publication, Design, and Manufacture*

According to Nezih Fıratlı, the First Divriği Cross (fig. 9) was discovered in the course of excavations in Divriği (Tephrike) in 1969.<sup>75</sup> It entered the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul in that year where it remains under accession number 8051. It was included in the "Anatolian Civilisations" exhibition in Istanbul in 1983 and illustrated in the catalogue.<sup>76</sup> Three years later, Marlia Mango published this cross and its Armenian inscription under the heading of the "Çaginkom (?) Treasure."<sup>77</sup> It was then republished by Erica Dodd in 1987 in her study "Three Early Byzantine Silver Crosses," being described variously as the "Istanbul cross" and the "Armenian cross."<sup>78</sup> For reasons which are unclear, but which may be related to the titles of the published studies and the several names under which the cross has appeared, its discovery does not appear to have registered in modern Armenian scholarship. As recently as 2007, Jannic Durand was apparently unaware of its existence and only Serge Mouraviev has included it in his recent study.<sup>79</sup> For our purposes, this cross shall be known as the First Divriği Cross.

It measures 58 by 32.2 centimeters. It has flared arms, each ending with two flattened disk-shaped serifs of the patté type. The two lateral arms have each been pierced with a hole in the lower border halfway along through which chains for *pendilia* have been hung. The chain on the left arm now consists of six links but the chain on the right hand arm comprises eleven links, from which a silver *pendilium* in the shape of an omega is attached. This is engraved with a single line around its perimeter and around the two irregular ovals cut to form the character. The other chain would have carried an alpha.

75 Fıratlı, "Some Recent Acquisitions" (n. 4 above), 197, no. 2 and fig. 14.

76 *The Anatolian Civilisations* (Istanbul, 1983), no. C48.

77 Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium* (n. 4 above), no. 76.

78 Dodd, "Three Early Byzantine Silver Crosses" (n. 4 above), 165, 167 and 169, where it is titled the Istanbul cross, and 177–79 and figs. 1–5, where it is styled Armenian cross.

79 Durand, "Reliquaires et orfèvrerie liturgique," 199, in Durand et al., *Armenia Sacra* (n. 1 above); Mouraviev, *Erkataguir* (n. 26 above), no. 13.





FIG. 9 The First Divriği Cross, front (photograph by Yanni Petsopoulos)

A simple engraved border extends around the perimeter of the obverse, comprising one narrow and one broadly gouged line. The cross retains its original tang, which shows no sign of repair. Its four stamps confirm that it was manufactured between 527 and 547.<sup>80</sup> The tang has a single hole, beneath which, toward the tip of the tang on the reverse, the accession number 8051 has been written in dark ink.

80 Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 76 and 249, following E. C. Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, DOS 7 (Washington, DC, 1961), 14; eadem, "Three Early Byzantine Silver Crosses," 166 and n. 8.



FIG. 10 The First Divriği Cross, back (photograph by Yanni Petsopoulos)

Within the border on the obverse is an incised, single-stroke Armenian inscription, transcribed, translated, and discussed below. The reverse (fig. 10) is decorated with the same engraved border. It also possesses five medallions, four engraved at the extremities of the arms and one at their intersection. Each medallion contains a nimbed bust: Christ is at the top, with a cruciform nimbus, holding a book in his left hand. The Virgin is located at the intersection, with a cross on her headdress. She is flanked on either side by two angels, both facing the Virgin. At the foot of the cross is another nimbed bust, similar to the Virgin except that her headdress lacks a cross. The identity of this female

figure is unknown. Significant traces of gilding remain on each of the medallions and along the border of the reverse; it may once have extended onto the serifs as well but no trace remains.

Straightaway, this cross presents a challenge. Judging from the arrangement of the surviving *pendilium*, the Armenian inscription was on the obverse, that is, the outward, public face. Yet the careful engraving and gilding of the five medallions and their border suggests that this face was, at some stage, the obverse. Two solutions present themselves. It is possible that the *pendilia* have been switched at some point, reorienting the faces of the cross, although Dodd noted that the chains appeared to be in their original positions.<sup>81</sup> In the alternative, she argued that the cross was intended to be carried in procession, with the omega hanging from the right lateral arm from the perspective of those in the procession, and the engraved figures in the medallions leading the procession on the obverse. But as Dodd then observes, this would lead to further complications when the cross was stationary; for the *pendilia* to retain meaning, the inscription would need to face the front. In my view, there is some damage to the first links on both arms but it is impossible to determine whether this is merely wear or deliberate tampering. Fortunately the inscription itself permits a solution and it is to this that we now turn.

### *Transcription and Translation*

The inscription extends in a single line of characters down the vertical axis from top to bottom and then along the horizontal axis from left to right. The priority afforded to the vertical axis is shown by the inclusion of a cross at the start and by the character at the intersection of the arms, a *tiwn* [Ճ], which belongs to the vertical sequence and so interrupts the horizontal sequence. The disruption to the latter is marked in the transcription with || and the transfer from one axis to the other by /.

+ ԳՈՀԱՆԱՀՈՎ ՄԱՏՈՒՑԱՆԷ ԲԱՐԵԽԻՍԻՆ  
ԻԻՐՈՅ /  
ՍԸՐԲՈՅ ԳԵՈՐ || ԳԻ ԺԱԳԻՆ ԿՈՄ /

+ In thanksgiving Čagin Kom offers [this cross]  
to his intercessor Saint George

81 Dodd, "Three Early Byzantine Silver Crosses," 169.

### *Palaeographic and Linguistic Analysis*

From a palaeographical perspective, this inscription is consistent with an early medieval date. Dickran Kouymjian noted that the form of the *ayb* [Ա] was very similar to those found on the late fifth-century inscription at Tekor, now destroyed, the Musrara Bird Mosaic inscription in Jerusalem, and the singular Armeno-Greek papyrus.<sup>82</sup> The *aybs* on the First Divriği Cross all display a pronounced loop in the right vertical stroke and a tail extending to the right, at an angle. This form is also found in the mid-seventh century inscriptions at Mren and Aruč; it is not however reflected in the Uxtaytur inscription from T'alin dated 783/84 CE, whose *aybs* comprise two vertical strokes without any loop.<sup>83</sup> The *vev* [Վ] on the First Divriği Cross is formed by two uprights of equal height, joined at the bottom by a curved line, with a tail extending to the right. This equality in height is an archaic form, illustrated in both the Musrara inscription and the Narses Cross above. The simplicity of the free-flowing *gim* [Գ] on both the First Divriği Cross and the Musrara inscription is evident. The *nu* [Ն] displays a consistency of form not found on the Narses Cross, comprising an upright vertical stroke topped with a flat bar extending to the left and a curved line joining the bottom of the vertical to another much shorter upright. Again this corresponds to those found on the Musrara inscription and the Šušannan, Vałan, and Eustathius mosaics in Jerusalem as well.<sup>84</sup> The First Divriği Cross displays no confusion between *ini* [Ի] and *hiwn* [Հ], as was observed on the Narses Cross discussed above. On the other hand, the loop of the final *ayb* in the inscription, the fourth character to the right of the intersection, is not completely closed, which suggests that the engraver may not have

82 D. Kouymjian, "History of Armenian Paleography," in Stone, Kouymjian, and Lehmann, *Album of Armenian Paleography* (n. 27 above), 60 and n. 230. For the Tekor inscription, see Greenwood, "Corpus," A.1 and Mouraviev, *Erkataguir*, no. 1; for the Musrara Bird Mosaic, see n. 26 above.

83 The Mren inscription, see above. For the Aruč and Uxtaytur inscriptions, see Greenwood, "Corpus," A.11 and A.14; and Stone, Kouymjian, and Lehmann, *Album of Armenian Paleography*, inscriptions 3 and 4, pp. 114–15.

84 Šušannan: Greenwood, "Corpus," B.2; Mouraviev, *Erkataguir* no. 6. Vałan: Greenwood, "Corpus," B.4; Mouraviev, *Erkataguir*, no. 7. Ewstat' / Eustathius: Stone, "Reassessment" (n. 26 above), 203–19 and fig. 7; Greenwood, "Corpus," B.6; Mouraviev, *Erkataguir*, no. 10.

appreciated that he was carving the same character as previously. This is the only instance of apparent uncertainty in letter form. Nezih Fıratlı believed that the inscription was much later but Dickran Kouymjian preferred a pre-Arab conquest dating, proposing that it was probably from the same period as the silver stamps.<sup>85</sup> We shall return to this below.

The linguistic analysis has proved to be more problematic. The notion of expressing gratitude by offering or dedicating an ecclesiastical item was expressed in contemporary Greek inscriptions on early Byzantine silverware.<sup>86</sup> A chalice from Phela, dated to the sixth or seventh centuries, employs the equivalent phrase εὐχαριστῶν, “in thanksgiving.”<sup>87</sup> The full meaning of the inscription, however, has proved elusive due to the sequence of characters at the end of the inscription. What does Čagin *Kom* stand for? Dodd reproduced ČAGINKOM in her translation but otherwise avoided discussing its meaning, beyond recording the responses of Nezih Fıratlı, Marlia Mango and Robert Thomson in a footnote.<sup>88</sup> Mango suggested that within these words lay the name of a village called Čag, Čagin, or Čaginkom, with *kom* representing κώμη, “village.”<sup>89</sup> This solution identified the village in which the church of St. George was located but had the disadvantage of leaving the donor strangely anonymous, undermining the very purpose of the inscription. Furthermore, as Thomson noted in the course of private correspondence with Dodd, “why a Greek word in a purely Armenian inscription?”

Following the discovery of the Narses Cross, it is now possible to advance a different solution. The donor of the First Divriği Cross was an individual called Čagin who held the rank of *kom*, an abbreviation of *komes*, the same title employed by Nerseh Xorxoṛuni in his dedicatory inscription. As discussed below, the same figure was also responsible for the donation of the Second Divriği Cross to a church dedicated to St.

George but he is identified on that piece without reference to his office of *komes*; this allows Čagin and *kom* to be detached from one another. Čagin was therefore the name of an individual who held the rank of *komes*, indicating his service in the imperial forces as a middle-ranking military officer. Sigillographic analysis confirms that *komes* could be represented as *kom*. Of the thirty-five Byzantine seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art dated between the sixth and ninth centuries carrying the title *komes*, ten employ precisely the same abbreviation, *kom*.<sup>90</sup> Čagin is not an Armenian name or any known variant of an Armenian name. It is extremely rare to find any Armenian names beginning čē [č]. As the inscription on the Second Divriği Cross reveals, however, this individual’s name generated a series of different spellings in Armenian and in Greek, to the extent that one can only conclude that it was a non-Armenian name, represented variously and imperfectly in Armenian and Greek characters.

One further aspect merits comment at this stage. As noted above, the First Divriği Cross is decorated with the busts of five figures, including an unknown female figure, but lacks any image of, or connection with, St. George. This only emerges through the inscription. There is therefore a significant gap between the content of the inscription and the visual representations on the object. While the assay marks on the tang confirm that this piece of silverware was manufactured and decorated in the reign of Justinian, arguably it was rededicated at some later date to St. George at the instruction of Čagin; the inscription confirms that he offered the cross to St. George, not that he made it, as the Narses Cross asserts. The present state of the First Divriği Cross is therefore the product of a two-stage process: its original manufacture and decoration with five gilded medallions on the

85 Fıratlı, “Some Recent Acquisitions” (n. 4 above), 197, no. 2; Kouymjian, “History of Armenian Paleography,” n. 230.

86 Ševčenko, “Sion Treasure” (n. 72 above), 42 and n. 27–29, where all the known examples were cited. Ševčenko did not however include the Armenian evidence from the First Divriği Cross.

87 Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium* (n. 4 above), no. 62.

88 Dodd, “Three Early Byzantine Silver Crosses” (n. 4 above), 166 and n. 7.

89 Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 76.

90 *DOSeals* 1:18.27, *komes tes kortes* of Thessalonica (VIII/IX c.) and 43.16, *komes tes kortes* of Macedonia (IX c.); 2:59.16, *komes tes kortes* of the Kibyrraiotai (IX c.) and 59.17 (X c.); 3:39.21–39, *komes* of the Opsikion (VII–IX c.), 39.40, *komes tes kortes* of the Opsikion (IX c.), 40.4–7, *komes* of Abydos (VI–VIII c.), 81.1–3, *komes* of Hieron (VII–IX c.); 4:1.18, *komes tes kortes* of the Boukellarioi (X/XI c.), 11.19, *komes tes kortes* of Paphlagonia (X c.), 22.26, *komes tes kortes* of the Armeniakoi (X c.) and 32.14, *komes tes kortes* of Chaldia (IX c.). The forms vary from KO to KOM, KOMHTI, and KOMITI. The specific abbreviation KOM is found on ten seals: *DOSeals* 2:59.16; 3:39.23, 39.24(b), 39.25(b), 39.33(c), 39.38, 39.40, 40.5, 40.7 and 81.3.



obverse and a second, subsequent rededication to St. George at the behest of Čagin, in the course of which the *pendilia* were switched and the blank reverse, now bearing the inscription, became the obverse. This proposition resolves the complicated relationship between the decorative medallions, the inscription, and the *pendilia*. In terms of when the inscription was added, it should be noted that from a palaeographical perspective, there is nothing which prevents it from having a sixth or seventh-century date. However in order to consider this issue fully, we must turn to the Second Divriği Cross.

## The Second Divriği Cross

### *Publication, Design, and Manufacture*

In his report of the finds at Divriği, Nezih Firatlı refers in passing to the discovery of a second piece of silverware which he called a “compound cross.”<sup>91</sup> Cyril Mango reported that this comprised five small crosses attached to each other, with a long Armenian inscription on one side and a Greek monogram on the reverse.<sup>92</sup> The object however has remained unpublished until now. It is preserved in the Archaeology Museum in Istanbul under accession number 8052, written in small red numbers on the tang between the hole and the shell clasp.

The Second Divriği Cross (fig. 11) measures 68 by 43.5 centimeters and weighs 12.40 grams. It is made up of five crosses, a central cross with flaring arms, each of which is attached to one arm of four slightly larger crosses.<sup>93</sup> The four outer crosses are arranged around



FIG. 11 The Second Divriği Cross, front (photograph by Yanni Petsopoulos)

the central cross so as to frame, or enclose, it. They remain independent of one another. Each of the arms attached to the central cross is smaller in comparison with the other three arms. Quite apart from the similarities in shape, this feature confirms that this piece was designed; it is not composed of five individual crosses collected and fitted together subsequently. All five crosses appear to have been cut from a sheet of hammered metal; there is a double-step design at the intersection of each arm with the center of each cross, including the central cross, which suggests they were cut by the same person. It seems unlikely that all five crosses were cut conjoined; rather they were prepared individually and then reformed into a single piece by the silversmith. The three unattached arms of the four outer crosses all end with two original spherical finials of the pommé type. Three of the outer crosses have

91 Firatlı, “Some Recent Acquisitions” (n. 4 above), 197, no. 2.

92 Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 76; Dodd, “Three Early Byzantine Silver Crosses,” 165 and n. 1 (both n. 4 above).

93 This arrangement of crosses may be compared with a full-page illumination in a tenth-century Armenian Gospels. Walters Ms W.537 was completed in 415 of the Armenian era [30 March 966 – 29 March 967] by the unworthy priest Sargis at the command and expense of the priest T’oros. At fol. 3r, the manuscript contains a full-page miniature comprising the outline of a cross beneath which the donor is sheltering. The center of this cross contains a cross within a circular blue frame. Three attached roundels extend above and below this central medallion while two stretch on either side. See <http://thedigitalwalters.org/Data/>

WaltersManuscripts/W.537/data/W.537/sap/W.537\_000009\_sap.jpg (accessed 21 November 2014).



FIG. 12 Second Divriği Cross, right crossarm, featuring inscription opening, marked by superscript cross (photograph by Yanni Petsopoulos)



FIG. 13 Second Divriği Cross, front of bottom crossarm, featuring Latin cross (photograph by Yanni Petsopoulos)

six finials; the fourth only has four because one of its arms has broken off, leaving a short stump. When this damage occurred will be discussed below. An unstamped tang is attached to the lower cross. It is rectangular in shape, concluding with a square rather than a pointed end, and pierced with a single hole. The tang was soldered to the cross and two strengthening clasps were attached, each taking the form of a shell. A similar shell shape forms part of the architectural relief decoration on the Riha paten, dated by Dodd to



FIG. 14 The Second Divriği Cross, back (photograph by Yanni Petsopoulos)

577 on the basis of its stamps, while the plaque from the Ma'aret en-Noman treasure depicts a cockleshell.<sup>94</sup>

The obverse of the central cross is undecorated. Extending counterclockwise around the perimeter of the four outer crosses is an engraved single-stroke Armenian inscription. Using the tang to indicate the bottom of the piece, the inscription appears to start in the lower arm of the right hand cross; the presence of a small cross inscribed above the first two characters marks its opening (fig. 12). Unlike the Narses Cross, all the characters face inward, making it impossible to read without rotation. Directly above the tang, at the intersection of the arms of the lower cross, a single-line Latin cross has been engraved, with small triangles at all four extremities (fig. 13). The reverse (fig. 14) is decorated with a single line border. The surface of

94 Riha Paten: Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 35 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1924.5); Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, no. 20. Ma'aret en-Noman plaque: Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 71 (Musée du Louvre, Département des Antiquités Grecques et Romaines, no. Bj 2180).



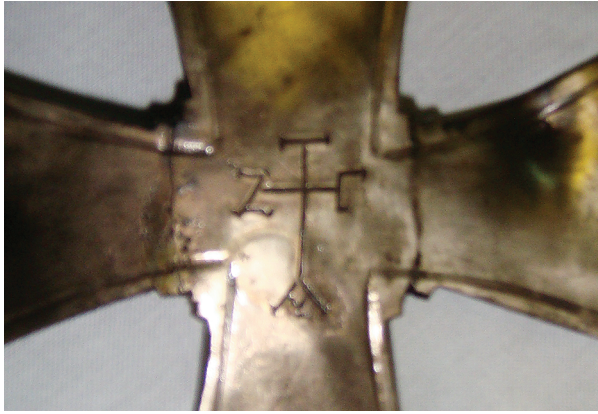


FIG. 15 Second Divriği Cross, back of bottom crossarm, featuring Greek cruciform monogram (photograph by Yanni Petsopoulos)

the intersection of the arms of the central cross on the reverse is discolored and disturbed. It is possible that this has been caused by corrosion but a more probable cause would seem to be solder residue. In other words, there was, at some stage, something soldered to this prominent location which later became detached and has been lost.

One final feature of the reverse merits comment. At the intersection of the arms of the lower cross, directly above the tang, a single cruciform Greek monogram has been engraved (fig. 15). This is not an imperial stamp or mint mark, nor an imitation or adaption of one.<sup>95</sup> Instead, as discussed below, it represents the personal name of the donor. It therefore corresponds most closely to the cruciform non-invocative Greek monograms found on seals and capitals from the first half of the sixth century and used until the tenth century.<sup>96</sup> Uniquely, however, this monogram takes the form of a Latin cross, with an extended lower arm. It is placed to match the position of the single-line Latin cross on the other side. By virtue of their respective locations, the Greek monogram and the Armenian

inscription are directly related to one another. Let us now turn to consider their content.

### *The Armenian Inscription*

As noted above, the Armenian inscription extends around the outer perimeter of all four crosses. The transcription below identifies the transfer from one cross to another with /. An elevated small cross, with short perpendicular bars at each extremity, is positioned between the first two characters on the bottom arm of the right-hand outer cross (fig. 12). This is represented in the transcription with a superscript +. This appears to signify the start of the inscription. If this is correct, the inscription concludes on the right-hand arm of the cross bearing the tang. This is marked by a second, smaller cross, again elevated but lacking bars, inserted between the final two characters, again represented in the transcription using + in superscript (fig. 13). While the use of a cross to indicate the start of an inscription has been noted previously, this is the first instance of it marking the conclusion. If one accepts this reading, the final part of the inscription around the cross bearing the tang is interrupted by the engraved single-line Latin cross. This third cross is represented in line 4 of the transcription below with +.

There is however an alternative reading. The two small elevated crosses are placed above the standard Armenian abbreviations for “God” and “Lord.” It is possible that their use should be associated with the content as much as the layout. If this is the case, the inscription opens on the right arm of the cross bearing the tang with a short doxology glorifying the Lord and concludes on the left arm with its dedication to the church. According to this interpretation, the engraved single-line Latin cross with the triangles would therefore identify the opening and closing of the inscription. Both readings are possible.

One further aspect to the layout of the inscription merits attention. It is not interrupted by the damage to the left-hand arm of the left-hand outer cross. The *men* [U] of *hUNB*, “my,” is split into two (fig. 16), the left hand vertical appearing before the break and the right hand vertical, together with the horizontal bar extending to the right, occurring after it; this is represented in the transcription below with ||. In my view, it is highly improbable that two separate characters could be damaged in such a way that the surviving elements nevertheless combine to form a single

95 See Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps* (n. 80 above) and in particular, Dodd’s discussion of “Irregular Silver” in her study “The Location of Silver Stamping: Evidence from Newly Discovered Stamps,” in Boyd and Mango, *Ecclesiastical Silver* (n. 8 above), 217–24, at 220–22.

96 N. Oikonomidès, *A Collection of Dated Byzantine Lead Seals* (Washington, DC, 1986), 152–53.



FIG. 16 Second Divriği Cross, left crossarm, damaged but with complete inscription (photograph by Yanni Petsopoulos)

recognizable character. Moreover the meaning of the inscription is not compromised by the damage; indeed it is very difficult to envisage what could be inserted into the gap. Thus one must conclude that the inscription was engraved after the damage rather than at the time of original manufacture. In any case, it seems highly unlikely that any donor would have been content presenting a new but damaged cross. Therefore it appears that both Divriği Crosses were engraved with Armenian inscriptions at some point after their manufacture, when they were reused and rededicated. As we shall see, this is not the only point of coincidence between them.

#### *Transcription and Translation*

Ա+Ծ ՈՐ ՅԱՂԲԵՒԱՅ ԿԱՆԳՆԵՑԵՐ ԶԻՍ  
 ԶԱՆԳԻՆ ԵՒ ԱՐԱՐԵՐ ՏԸՐՔՍԸՆԸՆԸՈՅ ԵՒ  
 ՎԱՍՆ /  
 ՄԵՂԱՅ ԻՄՈՅ ԱՊԱՇԽԱՐՈՒԹԵԱՆ  
 ՇԻՆԵՑԻ ԶՍՈՒՐԲ ԳԵՈՐԳ ԵՒ ԱՐԱՐԻ  
 ԶԽԱԶՍ /  
 ՏԵՐՈՒՆԱԿԱՆ ՎԱՍՆ ՀՈԳԻՈՅ ԻՄՈՅ ԵՒ  
 ԳԵԱՂԶՍ ՇԻՆՈՒԹԵԱՆ ԵՒ /  
 ԵՏՈՒ Ի ՍՈՒՐԲ ԳԵՈՐԳ +ՓԱՌՔ ՔԵԶ  
 ՏԻՐ /

+ O God you who have raised me Čangin from the dungheap<sup>97</sup> and have made me Tērk'sēnērjōy and for the repentance of my sins I have built [the church of] Saint George and I have made this cross of the Lord for my soul and the prosperity of this village and I have given to [the church of] Saint George + Glory to you, O Lord +

#### *Palaeographic and Linguistic Analysis*

The representation of the *ayb* [Ա], *vew* [Վ], *gim* [Գ] and *nu* [Ն] on the Second Divriği Cross all correspond closely to the same characters on the Narses Cross, the First Divriği Cross, and the Musrara Bird Mosaic in Jerusalem as well as the inscriptions at Mren and Aruč. Moreover the inscription on the Second Divriği Cross displays no confusion between *ini* [Ի] and *hiwn* [Ի] or between *yi* [Յ] and *c'o* [Ճ]. From a palaeographical perspective, therefore, once again there is nothing to prevent this inscription from having a sixth- or seventh-century date. Again there is distance between the form of the *ayb* on the Second Divriği Cross and that found in the later eighth-century Uxtaytur inscription at T'alin which lacks any loop. They may also be distinguished in their respective forms of the *t'o* [Թ]. In the Second Divriği Cross, this comprises two uprights of equal height, the right vertical having a loop at its base, as the line loops inside, crosses back over the vertical and then extends to the right. Although this equality of height is found in the earlier inscriptions, within the Uxtaytur inscription the right vertical has been shortened, resulting in the left vertical becoming the single leg and the loop on the right vertical being elevated.<sup>98</sup>

Two other unusual forms present themselves in the Second Divriği Cross, both of which appear to be archaic. The *jē* [Ջ] comprises a longer upright and a narrower loop than is typical; moreover it lacks any extension to the left of the upright. Unfortunately this is a rarely used character and there is no comparable

97 This vivid phrase is based on Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2:8. "[The Lord] raises [կանգնեմ] the poor from the earth and lifts the needy from the dungheap [շաղթեաց]." This implies a humble background.

98 For the Uxtaytur inscription, see Greenwood, "Corpus," A14; and Stone, Kouymjian, and Lehmann, *Album of Armenian Paleography*, inscription 4, p. 115.

example from late antiquity, incised on stone or silver or represented in mosaic. The open character of the semicircles extending either side of the vertical upright of the *p'iur* [ϕ] is also atypical. On the Musrara mosaic, these horizontal elements are curved bars. The inscriptions on the Narses Cross and at Mren display closed semicircles. The Second Divriği Cross presents a third form of this character. Two final observations should be made. In the first place, the engraver reveals no uncertainty in letter formation. And second, while it cannot entirely be ruled out, it seems unlikely that the same engraver incised both Divriği inscriptions. The respective forms of *ho* and *c'o*, in particular, differ significantly.

There are several striking linguistic features to the inscription on the Second Divriği Cross. The most prominent of these is the representation of the name of the donor. He is called Čangin rather than Čagin; this appears to confirm that different engravers were responsible for the two inscriptions. Moreover the Greek cruciform monogram on the reverse of the Second Divriği Cross comprises four characters which read TZAG, that is, Tzag.<sup>99</sup> This represents a third attempt at reproducing his name. Arguably, these variant forms—Čagin, Čangin and Tzag—were generated because the donor's name was not Armenian or Greek and the engravers came up with different solutions when attempting to represent it. In other words, his name produced different phonetic transcriptions; indeed it may well have been incapable of being fully transcribed in either Armenian or Greek characters.

Nor is this the only non-Armenian word to be included in the Armenian inscription on the Second Divriği Cross. The meaning of *Těrk'sěněřjoy* is unclear. The frequent use of the semi-vowel ě [ɹ] implies nonrecognition on the part of the engraver; this is his attempt to transcribe a non-Armenian word phonetically. Since the inscription states that it was accorded to Čangin by God, it is probably a title denoting status or rank. In the light of the rich array of ethnicities and languages found in the Caucasus, however, determining its meaning and origin has thus

far proved impossible.<sup>100</sup> But even if it were possible to identify the language or culture, one is left with the challenge of trying to understand why the donor chose to commemorate his donation primarily in Armenian. One solution would be to propose that his language had no written form and that he employed the dominant language of the social and cultural context in which he found himself—but if so, then how did he end up in eastern Anatolia?

We know that the East Roman Empire engaged with a wide range of peoples and cultures on and beyond its eastern frontier in the early medieval period, while it was at war with Sasanian Persia and then the Caliphate. It is likely that Čagin/Čangin/Tzag was attracted into imperial service—and granted the rank of *komes*—as a result. In the course of the conflicts, communities and individuals were displaced and resettled, some by accident but others by design. By way of illustration, Theophylact Simocatta, writing in the late 620s, records that the Roman forces under Narses took large numbers of prisoners in the aftermath of the decisive battle against Bahram Čobin in 591 and brought them before the triumphant Khusro II.<sup>101</sup> He executed some but sent those of the Turkish race to the emperor Maurice. They had crosses tattooed onto their foreheads and explained to Maurice that they had been marked in this way by their mothers on the advice of some Christians to ward off the plague then raging among the eastern Scythians. This colourful account may or may not be accurate but there seems no reason to doubt that these Turkish prisoners did come before Maurice. This being so, it would seem more likely that they were settled within the Empire rather than sent back to wherever they had originally come from.<sup>102</sup> I am not suggesting that

99 The form of the *alpha* in the Greek monogram is significant. Instead of a horizontal bar between the two uprights, the bar comprises two equal elements at an angle to one another forming a V. This is found commonly on early Byzantine silver and is employed on all the polykandela and openwork containers in the Sion Treasure: Ševčenko, "Sion Treasure" (n. 72 above), 40 and n. 9.

100 I should like to express my gratitude to those colleagues with whom I have shared this problem, including Dr. Dimitri Kastritsis, Dr. Andrew Peacock, Professor Steve Rapp, and Dr. Bert Vaux. Their linguistic expertise suggests that this word does not derive from Turkish, Persian, Arabic, or Georgian. I should also like to express my sincere thanks to Professor Peter Golden, who commented that *Těrk'sěněřjoy* did not "conjure up anything in a language known to me" and that "rooting around in the North Caucasus" would be a daunting task (private exchange by email 29 August 2012).

101 Theophylact 5.10.12–15.

102 It is possible that these Turks had been recruited into Bahram's army after his victory against them in late 588: Theophylact 3.6.7–14. See also Sebēos 70.17–27 recording that when



Čagin/Čangin/Tzag was one of these “Turks” but that warfare entails social dislocation and resettlement and that he may have been one such displaced figure, someone who settled in eastern Anatolia, in a predominantly Armenian-speaking culture in or near Divriği/Tephrike. We shall return to the issue of dating below.

From a linguistic perspective, the inscription offers one variant form, *gealʿj* rather than *getʿj* for the genitive of *gewlʿ*, “village.” It also speaks of *apašx-arutʿean*, “repentance” for his sins, rather than the more usual *tʿolutʿean*, “remission,” *pʿrkuṭʿean*, “salvation” or *barexōsutʿean*, “intercession.” This particular term does not feature in any other early medieval Armenian inscription. On the other hand, extending the range of the invocation beyond the immediate relatives of the donor to include “the prosperity of this village,” *vasn . . . gealʿjs šinuṭʿean*, finds direct correspondence in the inscription on the Narses Cross and the inscription at Mren, discussed above.

The inscription contains one further anomalous element. It refers to Čagin building the church of St. George as well as giving the cross to that church. Although there is an obvious connection between these two donations, recording them in a single inscription is, to my knowledge, unique among late antique and early medieval Armenian inscriptions. Strictly it would have been more appropriate to commemorate the building of the church separately through its own lapidary inscription. It may simply be the case that this additional detail was included to lengthen the inscription so that it extended evenly around the perimeter of the piece, in other words, on practical and artistic grounds. In the alternative, this may have been reciprocated on the foundation inscription on the church, that is to say, the foundation inscription referred to the donation of liturgical vessels to the church. There are instances of this practice in Armenia but these are dated to the tenth and eleventh centuries. By way of example, a lapidary

inscription dated 1036 on the Church of St. Saviour’s in Ani founded by Ablarib Pahlavuni refers to the donation of a chalice for the sacrament.<sup>103</sup>

The location of the church of St. George is unknown. Since the inscription does not further identify the village in which the church of St. George was located, it is likely to remain so. Even if the village itself was called St. George, which is possible, this does not provide any assistance. Nezih Firatlı reported that the two pieces were found together so it is possible that the church may have been close to the find spot. The context and accompanying assemblage of the find remain unknown but the lack of other items implies that the two pieces were not part of a hoard of bullion. This suggests deliberate concealment.

Čagin/Čangin/Tzag is not otherwise attested. Procopius refers to one *Χαναράγγης*, Chanaranges, a Persarmenian who conspired with Artabanes and Arsaces against Justinian.<sup>104</sup> Given the form of the Greek monogram, however, it seems unlikely that they are one and the same. Chanaranges may well be someone who settled, or was settled, in Persarmenia, for his is not an Armenian name. Furthermore Agathias refers briefly to one *Χαράγγης*, Charanges, who held the rank of *ταξίαρχος*, *taxiarch*, in the imperial army during the Gothic wars in Italy.<sup>105</sup>

It is clear from the above that the two pieces of silverware discovered at Divriği in 1969 are related to one another by virtue of their Armenian inscriptions. They were donated by the same individual to the same church. The First Divriği Cross is of a thoroughly familiar design and manufacture when compared with early Byzantine crosses, both tangible and depicted. The Second Divriği Cross, on the other hand, in terms of its design and manufacture, is, in present-day knowledge of late antique, early Byzantine, and early Armenian metalwork, unique. The precise circumstances in which Čagin/Čangin/Tzag donated these pieces to the same church will never be known, although it appears they were brought together by virtue of his ownership rather than being made at the same time or manufactured in the same workshop or

he campaigned in Armenia in 574, the Persian commander Golon Mihran had with him “many auxiliaries, *satars*, from the encampment, *i čambarē*, of the multitude of peoples who had settled in the mountainous region of the Caucasus, the peoples of the Huns. . . .” Since an earlier passage describes how this force was defeated on the plain of Xalamaxik, it is likely that this too would have been an occasion for the movement of Huns as captured soldiers into the Roman empire: Sebēos 68.13–17.

103 *Divan Hay Vimagrutʿyan* [Corpus Inscriptionum Armenicarum], vol. 1, *Ani Kʿalakʿ*, ed. H. A. Orbeli (Erevan, 1966), I, no. 135, lines 11–12: . . . *bažaki vasn pʿrkakan xorbrdoyñ* . . .

104 Procopius, *Wars*, 7.32.11–13 and 29–37. *PLRE* 282.

105 Agathias, *Histories*, 2.6.4–6.

inscribed by the same engraver. From its assay marks, we can be certain that the First Divriği Cross was manufactured between 527 and 547 but, as argued above, the tension between the dedication to St. George and the figures in the gilt medallions suggests a two-stage process, with the inscription commemorating its reuse and rededication rather than its original commission and manufacture. In much the same way, the damage done to the lateral arm on the Second Divriği Cross does not seem to have interrupted the flow of the inscription, again implying that the inscription was a secondary feature, added after the damage had been caused. Both pieces seem to be telling the same story, that it was Čagin/Čangin/Tzag who united them in the same church at some point after their manufacture, possibly at different times if the use of two different engravers is anything to go by. But when did this occur?

On the basis of palaeographic and linguistic comparative analysis, the Armenian inscriptions on both Divriği Crosses correspond most closely to Armenian lapidary and mosaic inscriptions dating from the sixth and seventh centuries. Conversely there is distance between them and the late eighth-century lapidary inscription of Uxtaytur, found at T'alin. We should however be cautious about ascribing an early date for the acquisition and rededication of these two pieces by Čagin/Čangin/Tzag on these grounds alone. Our knowledge of the different forms of the Armenian script used in the eighth and ninth centuries is almost nonexistent. Indeed if we compare these inscriptions with the character forms found in the earliest dated Armenian manuscript, the *Mlk'ē Gospels* of 862, we find correspondences once more.<sup>106</sup> The *aybs* in this manuscript possess loops, although these are much less pronounced than those engraved on the Divriği crosses or indeed those found in the other early medieval inscriptions. Moreover the vertical elements of the *t'o* as represented in the *Mlk'ē Gospels* are once again of equal size, as on the Second Divriği Cross. On the other hand, the forms of *ho* and *k'ē* [ϣ] in the Divriği crosses may be distinguished from those in the manuscript. Acknowledging that the Uxtaytur inscription should not be treated as necessarily representative of eighth-century Armenian

letterforms requires the chronological parameters within which Čagin/Čangin/Tzag made his donations to be extended through the eighth century and into the middle of the ninth century, if not further.

This dating does not take into account the form and style of the Greek non-invocative cruciform monogram on the reverse. As noted above, such monograms are found on lead seals dating from the sixth century onward and although the latest dated example was placed by Oikonomidēs in the last quarter of the eighth century, examples from the tenth century have been identified.<sup>107</sup> There is a second feature, however, which affords greater chronological precision, namely the particular form of alpha used in the monogram. In describing a seal with a cruciform non-invocative monogram bearing the name and office of Andrew *proedros* or metropolitan of Crete and dated on separate grounds to the eighth century, Nesbitt and Oikonomidēs observe that Α, the alpha with a broken horizontal bar, “tends to disappear by the mid-VIII century.”<sup>108</sup> In light of the analysis of both the Armenian inscription and the Greek monogram on the Second Divriği Cross, it appears that both pieces were engraved between the second half of the sixth century and the end of the eighth century.

This leaves us with the question of why two crosses were given by the same donor to the same foundation. It may well be the case that Čagin/Čangin/Tzag acquired the pieces at different times—hence the different character forms, reflecting different engravers—but had only one foundation to support. Another solution is to query whether the Second Divriği Cross is really a cross at all, despite the inscription defining it explicitly as such. Considering its open work, its circular character, and the presence of a tang, there are grounds for suggesting that this might be another piece of liturgical equipment, namely a fan, that is, a *rhipidion* or *flabellum*, in Armenian *k'šoc'*. Fans were used in the liturgy from the end of the fourth century in the East but the earliest surviving Armenian fan has traditionally been thought to date from the end

106 Stone, Kouymjian, and Lehmann, *Album of Armenian Paleography* (n. 27 above), 118–21.

107 Oikonomidēs, *Collection* (n. 96 above), no. 37; now *DOSeals* 1:18.79, Anastasios archbishop of Thessalonike. For a tenth-century example, see *DOSeals* 1:49.1, John, imperial spatharokandidatos and *tromarches* (read *tourmarches*) of Cherronessos (perhaps read Cherson [?]).

108 *DOSeals* 2:36.9.

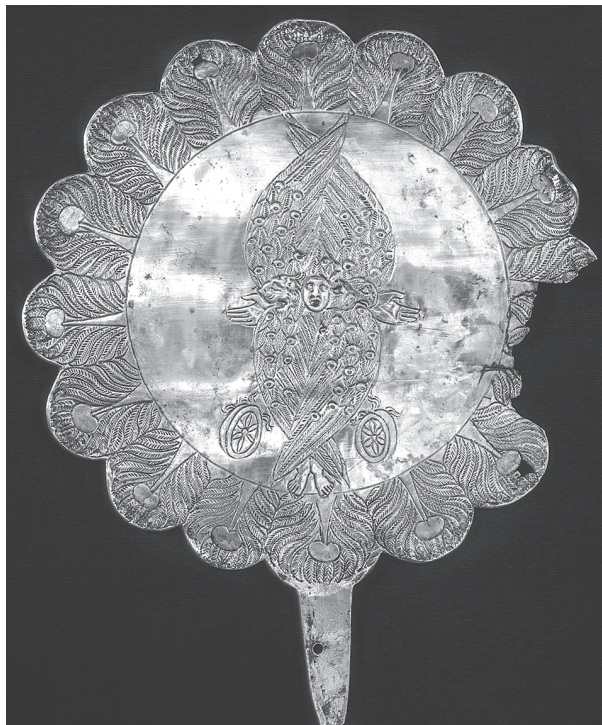


FIG. 17 Liturgical fan from the Riha treasure, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, BZ 1936.23 (photograph courtesy Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection)

of the seventeenth century.<sup>109</sup> The earliest Byzantine fans both date from the reign of Justin II and were published by Marlia Mango.<sup>110</sup> They are very similar in design and decoration to one another, to the extent that Mango proposed that they were finished in the same workshop. Each fan comprises a solid disc, with scalloped edges and a tang. The faces of the Stuma fan are decorated with a six-winged seraph in the center, surrounded by fiery wheels; both faces of the Riha fan are decorated a six-winged tetramorph (fig. 17). Both fans have sixteen scallops and these have been worked as individual peacock feathers. This recalls the use of real peacock feathers on the earliest fans, the

109 Durand, Rapti, and Giovannoni, *Armenia Sacra* (n. 1 above), no. 194 (Museum of the Holy See, Eĵmiacin, no. 799): “Les plus anciens éventails liturgiques arméniens connus sont attribués à la fin du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. . . .”

110 Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 31 (Istanbul Archaeological Museum, no. 3758) and no. 32 (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1936.23).



FIG. 18 Liturgical fan, Museum of the Holy See, Eĵmiacin, inv. no. 255 (photograph courtesy Museum of the Holy See)

eyes of the peacock feathers suggesting the many-eyed creatures guarding the throne of God as reported by Ezekiel and in Revelation.<sup>111</sup>

There are obvious differences in design and decoration between the two early Byzantine fans and the Second Divriġi Cross. However we know very little about the early forms of liturgical fans and it could be that there was a greater range than has previously been envisaged. Moreover a bronze disc from the collection of the Museum of the Holy See in Eĵmiacin (fig. 18) has also been identified by Jannic Durand, tentatively, as a liturgical fan.<sup>112</sup> It comprises an open-work cross inscribed in a circle, mounted on a shaft, with an outer

111 Ezekiel 1:5–10; Revelation 4:7.

112 Durand, Rapti, and Giovannoni, *Armenia Sacra*, no. 93 (Museum of the Holy See, Eĵmiacin, no. 255). In his commentary, Durand observes “la forme ronde rappelle cependant celle d’un éventail liturgique, dont aucun témoin n’a survécu en Arménie avant l’époque moderne.”



rim of open-work circles and moldings. In terms of its central cross, its circular character, and its evident mounting on a shaft, it resembles the Second Divriği Cross. Durand suggested that this object, previously considered to be a cross, was manufactured in Ani in the eleventh or twelfth centuries. Whether or not one is persuaded by this dating or attribution, this bronze disc from Armenia seems to be related in its form to the Second Divriği Cross.

If the Second Divriği Cross really is a *rhypidion* or *flabellum*, it represents an entirely new form of this piece of liturgical equipment, one that was previously unknown. Against this identification, one has to acknowledge its lack of tensile strength, its weight, and the distribution of that weight to the perimeter. It would not have been a straightforward task to waft this object back and forth across the sacrament. By the same token, however, it may not have been easy to use as a processional cross. But even if it is a cross, as Čagin/Čangin/Tzag believed it to be when he presented it to the church of St. George, it remains a unique form and extends our knowledge of early Byzantine and early Armenian metalwork.

Čagin/Čangin/Tzag emerges therefore as someone who was not Armenian but who served as a *komes* in the Byzantine army in the East and who acquired two pieces of liturgical silver which he then presented to the church of St. George, his own foundation. He may not have come from a Christian background, given that he recognized he had been lifted up from the dunghap by God. As a military officer, his personal attachment to St. George—reflected in his specific appeal to the saint as his intercessor or mediator on the First Divriği Cross—should not come as a surprise. Indeed it supplies a wider context within which to assess his actions as a donor. For as Catherine Jolivet-Lévy has recently shown, there was a well-established tradition in Cappadocia of military officers in the Byzantine army founding or rededicating churches.<sup>113</sup> The military background of these donors is attested by way of painted inscription or deduced from the surviving decorative programs, with representations of the archangel Gabriel and the archangel Michael, commander of the heavenly armies, featuring

prominently, alongside other military saints, including St. George, St. Theodore, and the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia. The painted interiors also express a particular devotion to the cult of the Cross, the symbol of Christ's victory as well as the sign of Constantine. The two Divriği Crosses reveal that Čagin/Čangin/Tzag was similarly inspired. It is striking to note that, like Čagin/Čangin/Tzag, the donors to the Cappadocian churches did not hold high military commands; they tended to be middle-ranking figures. Eustratios, named in the decorative programme at the monastery of the stylite Nicetas in Kızıl Çukur, held the office of *kleisourarches*; portraits of Leo and Michael, recently discovered at a ruined church in Güzelyurt, identify them as *skribon* and *tourmarches* respectively.<sup>114</sup> The donors in Cappadocia were therefore of equivalent rank to the donor in Divriği. Moreover the evidence from the Second Divriği Cross indicates that Čagin/Čangin/Tzag was a local landowner, since he dedicated it to St. George for the sake of his soul and the prosperity of "this village." The Cappadocian evidence does not articulate any connection between a donor and the site of his donation but it seems likely that they too held property in the immediate vicinity. Indeed the modest character of the donations supports the contention that these donors were locally significant figures rather than holders of high imperial office.

The two Divriği Crosses should therefore be assessed alongside the evidence from the painted churches in Cappadocia, three hundred kilometers to the west. For although the two pieces of silverware lack a church, and the Cappadocian churches lack any liturgical vessels, they express similar anxieties, hopes, and beliefs of middle-ranking military officers with local landed interests seeking divine protection and commemoration through modest endowments.

Two final observations may be advanced. If one accepts the proposed dating for the inscriptions on the Divriği Crosses, it follows that they were donated

113 C. Jolivet-Lévy, "Militaires et donation en Cappadoce (IX<sup>e</sup>–XI<sup>e</sup> siècle)," in *Donation et donateurs dans le monde byzantin, Réalités Byzantines 14* (Paris, 2012), 141–61.

114 Eustratios *kleisourarches*: N. Thierry, *Haut-Moyen Âge en Cappadoce: Les églises de la région de Çavuşin*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1994), 255–81; Jolivet-Lévy, "Militaires et donation," 141–44. Leo *skribon* and Michael *tourmarches*: N. Thierry, "Portraits funéraires inédits de deux officiers byzantins morts au combat sur les frontières de la Cappadoce: Étude préliminaire," *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Έτ.* 30 (2009): 169–76; C. Jolivet-Lévy, "Les cavaliers de Karbala," *Zograf* 33 (2009): 81–110.

before any of the decorative programs in Cappadocia were painted. For while a late seventh- or early eighth-century date was advanced by Thierry for the painted interior commissioned by Eustratios at Kızıl Çukur, and a late eighth- or early ninth-century date for the church of St. Basil in the region of Mustafapaşakoy, the present convention is to associate all of these commissions with the period from the ninth through eleventh centuries. The seventh- or eighth-century dating of the dedication of the Divriği Crosses by Čagin/Čangin/Tzag revives the possibility that some—or perhaps some elements—of these painted interiors in Cappadocia should be pushed back in time, into the eighth century or earlier. And second, both Divriği Crosses articulate through their inscriptions an unequivocal Armenian context of donation, commemoration, and liturgy. The Greek monogram and the title of *komes* advertise the career of Čagin/Čangin/Tzag in imperial service, not the social and cultural landscape in which he was settled. If one accepts that their discovery together in 1969 points to an intentional concealment from a nearby church, it follows that the region of Tephrike contained communities who were linguistically and culturally Armenian at the time of inscription. By contrast the Cappadocian churches reflect a different context of production, one that was linguistically and liturgically Greek.

### The Aparan Cross

Before concluding, we should note the existence of a fourth silver cross from medieval Armenia. This is preserved in the History Museum of Armenia under accession number 1894 and is sometimes called the Aparan Cross, after its chance discovery in fields nearby in 1951 (fig. 19). Although Yvetta Mkrtchian and Jannic Durand have published a short description, it has yet to receive full publication.<sup>115</sup> Measuring 41 by 25.5 centimeters, it is without inscription or assay marks, despite retaining its original tang, which is of a narrower design than that of the First Divriği Cross and lacks a hole. Its arms offer more pronounced flares than those on the three pieces described above. It retains one trilobed finial, which appears to have

115 Y. Mkrtchian and J. Durand, “Croix d’autel ou de procession,” in Durand, Rapti and Giovannoni, *Armenia Sacra*, no. 74.



FIG. 19 The Aparan Cross, History Museum of Armenia, inv. no. 1894 (photograph courtesy History Museum of Armenia)

been soldered on the lower arm. It is hard to determine whether or not this is original but the loss of the seven other finials indicates that a less-robust method of attachment was employed and this again serves to differentiate it.<sup>116</sup> A single-line border is engraved around the perimeter of the obverse. This extends into the extremities of each arm; moreover

116 Of the five middle Byzantine crosses discussed above (n. 13), three retain elegantly faceted finials with hemispherical or hexadecagonal terminals (the Cleveland, Metropolitan, and Cluny Crosses). The sleeves of each finial were riveted individually to the extremity of the arm. A fourth example, the Ortiz Cross in Geneva, has lost all its finials, revealing the two small holes at the extremity of each arm through which rivets would have been driven. J. A. Cotsonis, *Byzantine Figural Processional Crosses* (Washington, DC, 1994), no. 14, supplies a further example in gilt bronze, again dated to the eleventh or twelfth centuries (Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1951.22). By contrast the arms of the Aparan Cross lack holes, indicating a different method of attachment.

it retains a curved and bipartite character along the bottom of the lower arm, even extending some way down both sides of the tang. This is very different to the treatment of the border on the Narses Cross and the First Divriği Cross, both of which possess a single, continuous line across that axis, thereby isolating the tang from any decoration. It is, however, a feature of one of the Hama crosses.<sup>117</sup> The lateral arms of the Aparan Cross are pierced with holes for *pendilia*. These presently hold two small bells, of indeterminate date, which appear to have been added subsequently; their attachment seems clumsy. At the intersection of the arms, an oval gemstone has been mounted, of white and brown banded agate, within a simple single-beaded setting. The presence of a cabochon invites close comparison with the Narses Cross.

In terms of its design, and its pronounced flaring in particular, the Aparan cross is reminiscent of the crosses represented on the silver hexagrams of Heraclius and his son Constans II, which circulated widely in Armenia and the Caucasus in the middle of the seventh century and which may have been purposely minted for distribution in this region.<sup>118</sup> The inclusion of the cabochon, the single line border, and the holes for suspending *pendilia* afford an association with the three pieces described above. On the other hand, the trilobed form of the solitary finial is a feature of middle Byzantine crosses and serves to distance it from the three other pieces.<sup>119</sup> Mkrtchian and Durand argued that the Aparan cross, while displaying “une très grande fidélité aux modèles de la fin de l’Antiquité, probablement intentionnelle,” nevertheless dated from the ninth century or later.<sup>120</sup> A later reworking—or perhaps reworkings—would account for this unique combination of

features and does not preclude an earlier dating, perhaps seventh or eighth century. But further research on the Aparan Cross is needed before its relationship with the three inscribed crosses can be determined.

## Conclusion

This study has introduced a corpus of three pieces of ecclesiastical silverware bearing Armenian inscriptions. They have been studied individually and in comparison with one another, with early Byzantine silverware bearing Greek inscriptions, with early medieval Armenian inscriptions, found on the facades of churches and in mosaic, and with painted inscriptions from middle Byzantine churches in Cappadocia. On the basis of their manufacture and design as well as the content and form of their Armenian inscriptions, all three have been dated. The Narses Cross was commissioned by Nerseh Xorxoruni for a specific purpose and was inscribed at the time of manufacture, in the sixth or seventh century. By contrast, the two Divriği Crosses both express more complex historical trajectories, involving disruption, rededication and concealment. The circumstances of their composition and original donation are now obscure, although the stamps on the tang of the First Divriği Cross confirm that it was manufactured during the first half of the reign of Justinian I. Originally separate, the two pieces were brought together into the possession of Čagin/Čangin/Tzag and donated to his church of St. George, somewhere in the district of Tephrike, probably in the seventh or eighth centuries, and were later buried together, deliberately. The three pieces are associated with two figures who both held the rank of *komes*, indicating military service and command in the forces of the Byzantine emperor.

More broadly, each of these objects proclaims a complex identity. On the one hand, they correspond to the prevailing material culture of the sixth and seventh centuries. In terms of conception, manufacture, design and decoration, the Narses Cross and the First Divriği Cross may be considered to be early Byzantine. The form of the Second Divriği Cross is unprecedented although it too betrays features—flared crosses with spherical finials and decorative shell-shaped clasps strengthening the tang—which seem early Byzantine. On the other hand, all three inscriptions reveal a secure grasp of the Armenian

117 Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 7.

118 *DOC* 2.1: table 10, forms 13 and 15; Heraclius Class I: no. 64.16, 66 and 272.2; *DOC* 2.2: Constans II Class V: no. 57.1 and 57.4; Constantine IV Class I: no. 21.1; Class III no. 25.1, 26 and 27.1. For proposed circulation in the Caucasus, see T. W. Greenwood, “Armenian Neighbours (600–1045),” in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c. 500–1492*, ed. J. Shepard (Cambridge, 2008), 341.

119 Evans and Wixom, *Glory of Byzantium Art* (n. 13 above), no. 21A, a bronze processional cross with tri-lobed and beaded clusters, dated to the eleventh or twelfth centuries. This may be compared to Cotsonis, *Processional Crosses*, no. 14, and now Durand, Rapti, and Giovannoni, *Armenia Sacra*, no. 83, another bronze processional cross, from the excavation at Ani, dated to the eleventh or twelfth centuries, the tips of whose arms are embellished with trefoil serifs.

120 Durand, Rapti, and Giovannoni, *Armenia Sacra*, no. 74.



language. The Narses Cross and the Second Divriği Cross in particular display a familiarity with Armenian social and cultural traditions, in which donors remembered and sought redemption not only for their own sins but also prayed for the peace and prosperity of village communities. The Narses Cross takes this further, contemplating not only the donor's ancestors and other members of the Xorxoruni house but other noble families of Armenia as well. While the Mren inscription invokes divine assistance for the prosperity of the house of Kamsarakank', there is no comparable invocation for the peace and prosperity of other princely families. This is one of several new insights afforded through analysis of the three Armenian inscriptions.<sup>121</sup>

Together with the mosaic inscriptions from Jerusalem, these three pieces illustrate processes of cultural negotiation and fusion in which early Byzantine material culture has been appropriated and overlaid with assertions of Armenian ownership and control. To define this corpus as either early Byzantine or Armenian is to exclude the other and in so doing to fail to recognize the crosscultural currents which these objects reflect, individually and collectively.

Yet having stressed their common features, we should not lose sight of the differences between the three pieces. With its elegant lines, its niello inlay and its mounted cabochon, of extraordinary size and value, the Narses Cross is an outstanding witness to late antique craftsmanship. Its level of technical skill, artistry, and expense distinguish it from both Divriği crosses, which appear less refined. The

contention that both of these pieces acquired their Armenian inscriptions subsequently at the instigation of Čagin/Čangin/Tzag also sets them apart from the Narses Cross, whose inscription was evidently part of the original commission. While its sponsor clearly wanted the Narses Cross to advertise his Armenian ancestry from the outset, both Divriği Crosses reflect the Armenian milieu in which they came to be engraved and dedicated to St. George rather than the background of their donor. One may speculate that the Narses Cross asserts a metropolitan—perhaps even a Constantinopolitan—origin, given the workmanship and access to such a gemstone. Conversely both Divriği Crosses seem to advertise a more provincial background and invite comparison with the modest painted interiors of the middle Byzantine Cappadocian churches. We should not forget that whatever their origins, all three pieces were donated to village churches.

Individual and yet related, singular and yet connected, these three pieces of late antique silverware with their Armenian inscriptions have much to contribute to several disciplines—social and cultural history, art history, palaeography, morphology, philology, and linguistics. Suddenly, and unexpectedly, a corpus of late antique Armenian silverware has emerged.

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121 These include the variant genitive forms of *gewl*, village; the representation of *ĵē* [Ջ]; the plea for *apašxarut'ean*, repentance; and the reference to building the church of St. George in the inscription on the Second Divriği Cross.

☛ I SHOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS MY SINCERE thanks to Mr. Yanni Petsopoulos for the opportunity to study the Narses Cross and place it in context; to Professor Peter Golden, Dr. Dimitri Kastitsis, Dr. Andrew Peacock, Professor Steve Rapp, and Dr. Bert Vaux for their observations on the languages and

identities reflected in the wording of the Divriği Crosses; to the two anonymous readers for their invaluable observations; to Mr. Steve Sims for permission to publish his images of the foundation inscription at Mren; and to Mr. Andy Eccles for his assistance in formatting the figures.